June 16, 2026

Hello Reader, Welcome to the adventures of Sam & Gail.

Come with us as we travel all around the United States in a motor home. . We'd love to have you with us. Here's where we're going:

P2 2003 Introduction
P6 2004 Grand Canyon, Zion National Park, Mariposa California.
P44 2005 America's East Coast, Paradise Valley Campground.
P75 2006 A New Rig and A Wedding in Connecticut.
P86 2007 A New town, house & car. Moab, San Juan Islands, Glacier National Park.
P117 2008 House renovations, Pergola, trouble in Paradise.
P131 2009 Texas, Pacific Coast- California ,the Arch.
P158 2010 More PCH, The motorcycle Cruisers, Savannah.
P169 2011 Inventions, Alex Grad, the Dragon, Fairy Houses, Plumbing fun.
P182 2012 car quirk, W Virginia, The Bunker , Michigan, Greenfield Village.
P209 2013 Windshield saga, Pendelton -Stella Darby, Bryce Canyon.
P234 2014 Spring Fling, Boston, Ohio reunions.
P252 2015 Snazzy, Oregon : fires and cougars. **b**
P278 2016 Steves crisis, Slingshot Rally, D O T Bypass.
P288 2017 Laura moves home, Kim's honors , N C Rally, Snazzy II ,Eclipse.
P307 2018 Big Curt passed, Young Sam &Liz, Kim in Alaska, Address Fiasco.
P325 2019 -accidents- Floyd Karen & Kim. , Goodbye PVC,
P339 2020 Covid, Life Goes On.
P347 2021 A Tribute

C'mon, let's go!

Introduction.

On Thanksgiving day 2003 my best friend called to wish me a happy holiday. After the requisite small talk she put a friend of hers on the phone and suddenly my life was changed forever. His name was Sam and we hit it off instantly.

y. I was more than ready! He's a happy camper, fresh and exciting. We laugh together and share everything. Even our birthdays are just days apart. In the next weeks we grew very fond of each other.

But first, Here's how we met: That Thanksgiving I had several friends over for dinner . six of us who otherwise would have had hot dogs, got together for a nice meal. As we sat around the table bemoaning our stuffed bellies, the phone rang. I answered with my normal greeting of the day… Gobble, Gobble, Gobble!

My childhood friend Nancy, who currently lived in a motor home and traveled the country with

her husband Bob, laughed and answered with her own Gobbles. We exchanged a bit of small talk. She wanted me to speak with a friend of theirs. An unfamiliar, rather deep and friendly , voice said "Hello, this is Sam."

And just like that my life was changed forever !

After some cranial maneuvering I remembered Nancy telling me about a couple different fellows who traveled, volunteering all around the country. She said how nice they were and how they were each looking for someone available to travel with them. This one was very friendly as he chattered away. I was curious. I excused myself from the table and made my way out to the patio. He was fun to talk with and really very nice.

We carried on a conversation for quite some time and ended up arranging to meet the following Monday at my house. I must have been very enthralled with him because I never knew what happened to my dinner guests or even how the kitchen got cleaned up. Geez.

I learned he has a motor home and a Harley Heritage motorcycle. And he volunteers at the state park near Tampa for the winter because his elderly mother lives nearby. During the rest of the year he volunteers at parks all over the country, sightseeing and taking his time as he travels from one assignment to another. Nice work if you can get it.

but I have too many responsibilities here to do something like that.

Nevertheless, Monday I watched and listened for a bike. Right on time I heard a Motorcycle coming down my street and it pulled right into my driveway. all my neighbors were probably watching. I was outside by the garage door. He jumped off the bike, removed his helmet and came right up to me And gave me a big hug. It was the strangest thing but I hugged him right back. Both of us smiling as big as possible!

We came in the house, he had a quick tour and met my shih tzu, Paddington and we were off to lunch. He fitted a second helmet on me and showed me how to get on the bike without knocking it over. We rode down my street very sedately. I directed him to Siesta Key. He didn't go fast, yet it was exhilarating.

Up over the big bridge and down again and over the little hump bridge. After a sharp left we rode the length of the key.

The sun was shining and the beach road never looked so pretty, all curvy and winding with tall greenery along both sides. We rode through Siesta Key Village and down the coast, past the magnificent beach with its huge expanse of sugar white sand. At the south tip of the key was Turtle Beach and an adorable little restaurant with outside seating on a deck and colorful umbrellas over each table. They claim to have the coldest beer around, and they do have the best burgers. We settled in and continued exchanging life stories. We laughed and talked about everything we could think of. It was sunny and breezy, colorful, and just happy there. We ordered lunch and to my surprise I even ordered a beer for myself. It was ice cold and I enjoyed it to the last drop. This was unusual for me. I never particularly liked beer and had never actually finished one by myself. Then by golly, I had a second one!

Sam was sweet, considerate, funny, energetic, enthusiastic, smart, enjoyable, and he talks with a twang! Eventually it was time to move on and we stepped inside the building to pay up. . I went to the ladies facilities

while Sam took care of the check. When I came out he was standing at the end of the bar waiting to be rung up. I stood at his side near the edge of the bar, near where the waitress passes through to get behind it. I was sort of in the way so I scooted around the edge a bit. However, my feet didn't move with the rest of me and I went down flat behind that bar! Unknown to me, there was a little step up to get there. I couldn't believe it; our first date and I fall down behind a bar! How embarrassing. I got up laughing, Sam was laughing and soon everyone was laughing. On the way out to the bike I remember wondering if there were seat belts on that thing!

That day we rode all around the key, back to the mainland and out across Ringling Causeway to Lido Key. It was glorious. We had the most wonderful time.

While watching the news later Sam got on the floor playing with Paddington. This was the first time I ever heard Paddy speak. He was flat on his back and Sam was playfully rolling him around, nuzzling him with his face practically buried in Paddy's tummy. Paddy was looking up at me on the couch when I heard a low, soft, plaintiff little voice saying very slowly, "Mamma, he's messing with me. I don't like it." It was so darned cute and a perfect voice for such a bewildered puppy. From then on Paddy talked to us quite a bit.

The day flew by and it soon would be dark. I offered Sam a plate of lasagna before he had to head home. He scoffed it up and dressed for his ride back to Tampa. We'd been riding in short sleeves all afternoon but he assured me by the time he got to Tampa it would be freezing on the bike. He donned his leather chaps, coat and helmet and was off.

It was a magical day and I hoped he could excuse the 'falling behind the bar trick' and want to see me again. Well, we'll see...

I need not have worried. Sam was evidently as smitten with me as I was with him. Each time we talked during the next week it was all fun and laughter.

One day he picked me up in his little car and we went to see Nan & Bob where they were camping with friends. Such A lovely evening under the stars with a blazing campfire in our midst. The food was great, especially Nancy's wonderful baked beans...

Uh oh. Did I say baked beans!

ultimately, the evening was too funny. It had been alluded to that I could stay the night either at Nan's or at Sam's, whichever I felt comfortable doing. Later, in the privacy of Sam's rig, we wondered if there was a method to her madness. Neither of us could make a move without tooting! Our first serious night together and all we could do was laugh.

But as our relationship grew deeper, we began to think of Nan as our own personal Cupid. If not for her we never would have met. Thank you, thank you Nancy. We are forever grateful.

The next evening we all went to the Moose Hall for spaghetti and dancing. Again, a super fun time. This was the first time Sam and I danced together. He's very enthusiastic and has good rhythm. He caught on to the rock step easily. We're the same height and fit together perfectly.

Days later Sam was in Mississippi visiting his daughter and family for the Christmas holiday while Paddington and I were at Kim's. On her 40th B day we saw " A Christmas Carol" with a friend. A girls night out. Another day we shopped for a new car and she decided on a green minivan . I had some quality time with the boys, especially Alex. He and I did an aerobics work out several mornings, and played Who Wants to be a Millionaire quite a bit. I did loads of laundry, cooked up a minor storm, and baby sat. Totally endearing myself to my grandsons parents. They'll miss me!

Sam and I were in touch daily through the holidays. As he drove home from his daughter's house he picked Paddy and me up. It worked out beautifully, but it seemed we both had the beginnings of colds. Sam was wiped out from his trip so we stopped in Tampa and stayed overnight in his rig, driving home in the morning. With head colds and fever, neither of us felt good. We got home and slept. Feeling better the next morning, He drove back to Tampa early to work Those next few days. He's required to work 20

hours per week in lieu of his campground hookup. He also does interpretive gigs and maintenance jobs.

We hadn't made plans for New Year's Eve since we both felt under the weather and needed to rest. At my house, Jose made a batch of Pina Colada and by 9pmI was asleep with sugarplums dancing in my head. So, Reader, Happy Dreams and Happy New Year.

Read on and enjoy our antics and our travels as we cris cross our wonderful country in An RV.

The fun's just beginning!

2004 January 1 Happy New Year!

I'd just begun a project at my house which I figured would keep me busy and out of trouble for a while. I was putting down a patio of sorts. Using a combination of sizes and colors of concrete squares, I was extending the driveway at the side of the house by making a walk to the front door of the apartment, pass the glass doors, and into the back yard a bit. This would make a pretty patio under the Chinaberry tree.

I'd barely started one day when Sam arrived on his Harley. He jumped right in, correcting the angles of the ones I'd temporarily laid out. It was quite a job and we had to do some areas over several times before getting the tilt and angles just right. The hardest part was at the apartment door where it

had to be low enough for the screen door to open, then tilt up high enough at the corner of the drive to make it a smooth transition, and yet angled in such a way rain wouldn't run in the house. Thank goodness he came when he did. He's technical and understood the problems immediately. And he's strong! these concrete slabs didn't phase him a bit. We worked a couple hours on it and went off to play the rest of the day.

Saturday we met friends Liz and Ed at Rossiter's Harley for hot dogs and cokes. Then we all rode to Anna Maria Island to the Sandbar Restaurant and ended up at Ed's boat watching the sunset on the gulf. A beautiful day.

Sam returned to Tampa the next morning. Sad to see him go. We have fun together. He's so easy to be with; I miss him already.

A few days later while chatting with him on the phone, he sort of suggested he come down that evening rather than waiting for morning as we'd planned. I would have loved that but I had plans with friends and didn't know how late I'd be out. I thought it better that he come in the morning. He said "O K what time are you up? How early? 6am?" I said I could be but how about calling me when you get here and I'll get up and open the door. Ok? Ok. So I'm sound asleep when the phone rang. It's Sam. And it's 12:30 am. Well, O K I guess it's morning!

What a nut. So we had another neat week end…

Friday night was a Biker Ball at Michael's on East, a United Way benefit. This is a swanky place with excellent food and entertainment. But it was a cold, rainy evening, Dress code was jeans and leather, no bikes. We met Liz and Ed there and we all had a good time.

Saturday we went in Sam's old car to lunch at Anna Maria Pier, did a movie later and just enjoyed the day together. Sunday he returned to Tampa. Phooey

L & E have been on and off about three times since New Years Day. I think they're a little nuts.

Sam thought he'd have to stay home the next week end to take care of stuff. Maybe sell the little car we call 'the jerk'. So named because of a

weird thing it does every time you slow down. It leaks oil and is ready for the junk yard.

I was set to miss him and keep busy with my yard project for the next week when he called saying he'd pick me up in two days in the motor home and whisk me off for an adventure!

Friday noon. Here comes a HUGE white chariot tooling slowly down my street.

We grabbed Paddy and took off for four days. How exciting. We camped, cooked and enjoyed Juniper Springs that evening. The next day we moved on to Bulow Campground where we settled the rig and Paddy and took off on the bike. Sam was excited to show me the fascinating and strange sights on Florida's east coast. Like Ormond Beach, Daytona, and Boot Hill where the ceiling is draped with women's bras from years gone by. We checked out the leather stores for chaps and coats and stuff. We brought back two steaks and had a scrumptious dinner that evening. And I had my first lessons on living in an RV.

Sunday morning was rainy and cold. We lounged around playing gin rummy, waiting for the weather to clear. It didn't so we hit the road for Tampa. We got back to Hillsborough River just in time to get the RV parked before dark. He backed that huge thing right into its slot there in the middle of trees like it was a little scooter! I was duly impressed.

We purchased Fun Passes At Busch Gardens for the year so Now we can ride the roller coasters any day we want ! Paddington was with us for all this and he was great. He rides at my feet up front in the rig where he's in a small, secure area. He gets anxious when we're out of his sight. He needs to be near people.

When we got back in Town we stopped at a consignment shop Liz mentioned where I might get some leather chaps. I guess these are necessary for cooler weather. I didn't find any in Daytona but here they are, a perfect pair for me. Very flattering. now I guess I'm ready for anything.

2004 February. Everything's exciting with Sam. Paddy and I spent several weekends with him at his campground in Hillsboro River State Park where I met some of his friends.

We went to a Super Bowl cookout, the Fort Foster reenactment, walked along the river and several other fun things. We're so happy together; I like him more every day. He doesn't try to impress me, he's just himself. So darn cute!

We've been to the beach club several times. Not the greatest dancer, does the country boy shuffle or something, but that doesn't matter. I just love being with him.

Last Thursday we took off in the motor home for Race Week at Daytona and got a campsite 35 miles away. Liz and Ed had a room on Main Street in town. But it was freezing out! We bundled up and rode into town thinking it would soon warm up. We were layered to the hilt and covered in leather. But the day simply got colder. I used to think Daytona was in Florida!

We met them for lunch and wandered in and out of some shops, still wearing our heavy duds. I suggested we start back to the rig sooner rather than later. Even so, we nearly froze to death getting there. I sat huddled in a knot behind Sam . This biking thing was new to me and I wondered what I was getting into. I tapped him on the shoulder and asked if he was enjoying this. Like, are we having fun now? He shook his head No. Suddenly he pulled off the road, jumped off the bike, and a minute later gave me a big , hot container of boiled peanuts. Warming my hands actually was a great relief. The next day's weather report called for more of the same so we fired up the rig and left for home! When Ed called to see what we were doing, we were already home. Since Sam wasn't due at his new location for a few days we came directly to my house. He backed that big rig right into my driveway like he'd done it a thousand times already! I was again duly impressed. In a few days he'll relocate at a state park in Bradenton where he'll volunteer for the next few months, much closer to Sarasota.

My apartment dwellers decided to stay only two months when they had an opportunity to be on Siesta Key for the remainder of their Florida time. So I called Bob and Sue Wells in Ohio who volunteer with the Cincinnati Reds when spring training begins. They were thrilled. They're nice folks and no bother. In fact, since I've been gallivanting with Sam, sometimes They even take care of Paddy for me.

This is crazy. The Liz & Ed saga. They fuss and argue every other day. Last week at the Beach Club they yelled at each other all the way to their car. the next day she tells me they're going to bike week together. Go figure.

2004 March. We spend all our spare time together and enjoy every minute. Bob & Sue have been here a month already . They're fun to have around but this is the last game for the Reds and they'll go back to Ohio. I started an ad and we'll see who shows up next.

We're engrossed in plans for our cross country tour! There's much to do! Sam plans everything on his computer. Little by little, things get done, Lists are made and things get checked off. We talk about it and decide what we want to see and where to go. I can hardly believe this is happening. Hoodathunkit?!

Life is such fun with Sam. We get 4 or 5 days together, then 3 days separate. It works out well. One day we worked trimming and weeding in the yard and the next day we rode the bike to Bush Gardens. Young Sam, 9, spent a few days with us. He was great and we enjoyed his company. He loves science and can talk your ear off about things he's read and learned. Very impressive. Saturday we were in Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa for a couple hours before meeting Kim and Alex at a BBQ place. They'd been visiting Curtiss in New York City. We handed Sam over to his mom and they all went home from there. Big Sam and I breathed a sigh of relief and drove home in relative quiet.

2004 April. I'm getting excited now . All my little duckies are lining up. I made a secretary/phone book in a three ring binder with pockets for stamps, pens, checkbook, calendar, etc., my total Travel Secretary. And it's all on my computer. Pretty neat.

Paddy will be with us so I have his records and enough pills to last the trip.

Just had a visit from Jose Garcia, one of my long time winter residents who stops by occasionally to chat. Sam's on his way down from the campsite in Little Manatee. We have three days together, then he'll work three days , then he's done for good and off we'll go!

We'll be back the first of August: check on the house and all and then go to North Georgia as volunteers again at a campground for September and October. That's a hefty schedule but sounds like fun. We don't know yet if we'll get the Georgia gig or not. Depends on someone canceling. But for now… Sayonara Florida!

2004 May. On the Road. Sarasota to the Ozarks, Branson & New Mexico.

By mid May Sam & I, with Paddington, were ready to take off on our cross country tour. The RV was packed, greased, gassed, and ready to go. The best thing I remembered to take was a little tape recorder. I'll record everything we do and type it up later. It'll be great fun to reminisce with. Our first stop was Kim's house in Gainesville. After a nice evening together and breakfast in the morning, we head up I75 an across to Alabama. We'd stay at a Walmart parking lot, Boon docking. Gosh, one day out and already I know about Boondocking. This is what you do when going from point A to point B but just need to stop and sleep. So my first night on the road was spent in a Wall Mart parking lot in Andalusia, Alabama. Now, isn't this romantic. We pull in and find an area on the perimeter of the lot where we cut across about ten parking spaces. We're in a 35 foot motor home, towing a black Cherokee trailer with the motorcycle inside.

But it's late in the afternoon and the lot is nearly empty anyway. Just for fun we thought we'd get the bike out and ride around the town a bit and get a bite to eat. Oops, someone already pulled their car right behind the trailer. We'll have to pull forward a bit to get the bike out. Sam went to start the RV… he turned the key but nothing happened. Oh great, dead battery. Now, optimist that I am, I never gave it a thought that this could be a sign of things to come: one day out and we have a dead battery.

Nope, just Oh well, here we are at Walmart. How convenient, they sell batteries.

So that worked out well. I mean, what if we were out in the country at a private campground when this happened? Our G A is watching over us. (That's Guardian Angels, remember.)

Not to disparage Walmart as I suppose this could happen anywhere, but after installing two different new batteries and the engine still didn't start, Sam tested all the others in the store and found only one that was good. He installed it. We didn't get to ride around Andalusia but

settled down for the evening and discussed our Overall plan.

We'd head west to southern California, up the Pacific Coast Highway -the PCH- to the Oregon coast and on to Portland. This was so exciting, Nothing could dampen my spirits.

We planned to stay in the Portland area for a few weeks having fun with my daughter. Then we'd figure out how to get back home. This was just too cool. No plane to meet, no time restraints, just stay and visit for as long as we want, then move on.

The next day we jotted over to Sam's daughter's home in Brandon, Mississippi. This was the first of his family I met and they were sweet. Debbie was especially nice with her very strong Southern Accent. His grandson Dylan, is a cute 9 year old.

It was good to meet them. We retired to our rig parked out front in the street.

The next few days we were in the Ozarks. At one point we were totally lost on the twisty highway 8 in Arkansas. After following the arrows, we were heading down a two lane road. We went on and on for a while and just as I was thinking this was a pretty ride, it crossed my mind it could be someone's private lane.

Then Sam read a tiny sign close to the ground… Road narrows. Narrows?! we bumped over a little hump back bridge and actually pulled right into

someone's yard! We stopped next to a very tall straggly overgrown hedge. In the trees in front of us were several small outbuildings and a yard littered with Old rusty wheels, appliances, and junk. All hidden in the grass. Sam left the rig to check out a house he thought he saw behind that high hedge. Just as I thought I heard banjos playing, someone knocked at our screen door. Uh oh. This was too weird…

and where the heck was Sam? Paddington, my guard dog, coward in my lap as I sat on the steps with the screen door protecting us from a man in farmers overalls . Well, the guy was nice enough and Sam returned alright. The guy claimed this wasn't the first time this had happened; he's even had 18 wheelers down here. He showed us how to get out of there:

pointing to a clump of trees at the edge of the yard, he directed us to go down around them and back up. He had to move a couple vehicles and junk out of the way and we slowly drove the rig as directed. Phew, I wondered how many cars and rigs were buried beneath this marsh. soon we were headed back out that little road.

Thank goodness that wasn't a bog or quicksand back there. And I don't know what we'd have done if another vehicle tried to come our way on that tiny road. Thank you Guardian Angels! But did we really need this weird, scary experience at the beginning of our trip?

That evening we stayed at Lake Catherine, a beautifully wooded campground. It was nice chatting with other travelers and their pets. Paddy loves everyone. The next day in Hot Springs we each had massages at a famous bath house. I had a lovely soak, massage and treatment and returned to the lobby, refreshed and feeling great. Sam wasn't there yet, and was, in fact, quite a while longer getting his treatment. I hoped he was enjoying his very first massage. When he finally showed up he didn't seem particularly happy. Hoo boy.

Around this time we became aware that living in the woods produced its own problems. We had fleas in the rig and I soon learned that one of us, not me, was having a problem of a very personal nature: a tick had nested in a certain unmentionable place. Since neither of us was sure how to handle this, we looked for a Quick Care clinic or an E R. We hopped on the bike and

soon came across a veterinary clinic. Good. stop here! They'll know what to do. We approached the medical people at the front desk, explaining that a friend of ours (wink, wink) had a little problem and didn't want to aggravate it by doing the wrong thing. They smiled knowingly and after explaining the best procedure to help our friend (wink wink), we were on our way.

Later that evening we had another unwelcome episode. I'd been out with Paddy for one last stroll of the day. It was dark out and when we got back in I flipped the light switch to turn the outside light off. But instead, the steps came in. No, that's not right. I flipped it back but the steps stayed in. There was a good three foot drop off at the door. Immediately I mentioned this to Sam and asked why the steps wouldn't go back out. He started to explain how you must have the coach motor running to do that. and this and that all must be in the right configuration, etc., etc. He said not to worry about it as we were about to retire for the night. He'd set it right in the morning.

Ya, right. A while later I was in the bedroom when I heard some weird thumping and yelping. What's going on, I yelled. Sam was on the floor holding his foot. "Gail, don't ever touch any of those switches on the panel near the door." He'd stepped out right into the abyss. And now had a broken toe. I doubt he'd ever ask me to travel with him again.

We drove the next morning from Hot Springs to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. A lovely ride through the Ozarks. We found Beaverton Campground, a privately owned park on a bend in the river. Across the water was a tall, smooth cliff. The bridge crossing the river into Eureka Springs is an historic suspension bridge called "The Bridge Into Nostalgia" and is listed in the National Registry of Bridges. When we were making our reservation for this park the campground owner encouraged Sam to drive through Eureka and across this historic bridge. It didn't sound like such a good idea to him, so we went a longer way around the town and into the park. Thank goodness! This bridge is about 112 inches across and the rig is about 109. We'd probably have lost a mirror or something. We did cross it on the bike a little later and rode all around the Alpine village of Eureka Springs, a darling little town of shops and eateries. We dined that evening at a Bavarian Restaurant.

After our time in Hot Springs and Eureka Springs, we left the Ozarks and drove to Branson, settling in at Table Rock state Park. This is a lovely, comfortable, shady campground where We'll stay several days. We put out the awning and chairs and made ourselves at home. Experienced as he is, Sam likes to drive about 300 miles per day and arrive at his destination by 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Then we relax with Paddy and maybe a cool one the rest of the day. We reminisce while I make notes of the day's happenings. We walk Paddington and visit other campers. A nice social time.

In the morning we rode into Branson and purchased tickets for several shows. We saw Shoji Tabuchi. What a terrific show. He plays the violin throughout the program. However, his love of country western music prevails. As a child he heard Roy Clark and Company at a concert in Japan and fell in love with this music. He came to America around age 15. His theater is gorgeous. His show is versatile, entertaining and fun. Singing, dancing and music from rock to classic to country, all featuring him and his violin.

Afterward we slipped into Gilley's for hamburgers and Then on to The Paul Harris Show. This was an absolute riot. This Arkansas guy kept me in hysterics. Good clean jokes and terrific bluegrass music. He had a singer named Clay Cooper who was wonderful. Everyone was great. We laughed through two hours and got back to the RV around 10:30 that evening. We sat outside, a beer for Sam and a hi ball for me, and our little tape recorder. This was still surreal to me as I thought of myself back home doing my regular routine of running the house, working in the yard and watching TV. Here in the rig we haven't even turned it on!

The next day, after seeing Yakov Smirnoff's early morning show and having lunch in town, we settled down in the rig to enjoy a nice tall iced tea. We were discussing the hilarious show we'd just seen when a new neighbor began backing his rig into the site beside us. It was a fifth wheel. The couple was in a big truck they use to haul these rigs. They began backing up

as Sam idly watched the maneuver. He said, That guy is going to hit that tree.

Then, sitting up straighter… " He's gonna hit that tree! He's gonna hit that tree! Aw geez! He hit it."

It was quick , no time to react. The guy just backed up until he hit the tree. We couldn't figure why the woman in the truck didn't get out to help him back up. Well, maybe she wasn't able. Later that evening the man assured us this wasn't the worst of it. One day he took off without locking the fifth wheel hitch properly and it all came crashing down into the truck bed. Gads. There's lots to consider in this modern camping thing.

We left Branson, did our requisite 300 miles and pulled up to a Walmart in Oklahoma. What the heck! A big heavy bar was assembled like a goal post across the opening to the lot, low enough to keep trucks and motor homes from entering. We were shocked.

Not very welcoming. I suggested we go around back where trucks must be allowed to go to offload merchandise and see if we could get in. So, by golly, we went in! We parked off to one side of the building. We did some shopping and settled in for the night. The next morning several other RV's were parked nearby. We can't figure why they put the bar up but we're glad they didn't try to tow us away!

Before long we were crossing the Texas Panhandle heading for New Mexico; A long boring run. Sometimes this route is exceptionally windy. In fact, the wind was so fierce that day, we saw a motor home with the front top of its roof lifted right off the rig. I couldn't comprehend this. However, since the recent years of devastating wind and tornadoes, I realize worse things than that can happen. But

We drove that same road that same day so it seems our Guardian angels are with us.

This area of New Mexico feels pretty desolate But many folks see beauty where others don't. It's hard and rocky, briers and thistles cover the ground. Paddy's not a happy camper here. And now I understand why cowboys wear leather chaps. During the day it's so hot your skin feels a burning sensation

as soon as you step outdoors. And the temp drops to nearly freezing overnight. Thank goodness for the fast acting furnace and the blower in these rigs.

Albuquerque, New Mexico...

Sam makes our arrangements as we go along; his Trailer Life Magazine, Walmart maps and other books help him pick our destinations. We belong to Passport America and I have a Golden Access Card so we stay most places for half price, about Nine to thirteen dollars , But it's interesting to see some of these places after reading about them in the directories.

We'd reserved a site in' Hidden Valley Resort' in Albuquerque. Sounds pretty, right? Sure. It had a pool. However, there were 50 sites, all lined up side by side at an angle on a hillside. They were so tight together we couldn't even put the awning all the way out without touching the next rig. They manage to squeeze the hook up in between, but you must be careful using it. We were not permitted to use a grill outdoors. I'm not sure there was even any water in that pool. Ergo: Private parks can be very skimpy, while state parks give you lots of greenery and space. Beware the word Resort!

We rode the bike up the Turquoise Trail almost to Santa Fe. It was quite along way and we were practically alone on the road the whole time. We'd passed a nice looking cafe a while ago and decided now to go back to see if it was open for lunch. We were surprised to find the San Marcos Café packed with people And the food delicious.

We went to Old Town Albuquerque, the original Albuquerque, made up of adobe and hacienda architecture. There are many forms of art here created by local folks, including Ancient cooking vessels unearthed in the desert over the years .

We browsed through paintings and other gorgeous, hand made articles. These shops surround a pretty park. At one end of the park is a tiny Franciscan Catholic church , still in use. We went inside and felt the nice peaceful, spiritual feeling about it. It was wonderful

After lunch at nearby Little Anita's, we decided to get some hot sauces and salsas for friends, so back to the shops we went and filled our saddlebags. That evening I thanked Sam for bringing me here to see all these wonderful sights. I never expected or thought of myself riding around the country like this. He replied with his own feelings of gratitude that we could share everything and it got so gooey I'll have to stop writing now.

2004 May. The Grand Canyon and Zion National Park.

How exciting! After leaving the ' luxurious' Hidden Valley Resort, we drove about 330 miles listening to a book and then overnighted in Flagstaff at a Wally World.

The next morning… Good grief! It's 5:58 am and we're on the road already? Why am I up so early? Did we have coffee ? Yes, two hours ago. Driving through all these time zones has us completely discombobulated. Anyway, it wasn't too far from Flagstaff to the Grand Canyon and we'd reserved a site at a campground just a mile outside the entrance. But we arrived too early to check in so we drove past it and went on to the Canyon entrance where a park ranger hailed us right in. He told us to park at the Market Place where there's a store and post office and a café. So that's what we did. No large spaces for rigs were marked off so we parked across some car spaces at the edge of the lot. We left Paddy inside, in total comfort, and began the day's adventure.

First, a lecture on the geology of the area. That should be mandatory for first timers because It's so informative. Then the bus tour. This is a well organized program. By using the information flyers, we decided where we wanted to jump off. We could spend as much time as we wanted at each stop and get on the next bus to continue. No matter where you got off, you were at another gorgeous view of this massive canyon. No words can express the grandeur. We walked far enough down the Bright Angel Trail to claim we 'DID' the trail. No mule ride or overnight camping for us. 25 years ago, perhaps, but not now. It was wonderful just to be there and see everything, especially with the binoculars. Eventually our bus brought us back to the Market Place. The bus passed by our Paddy wagon as it took us through the parking lot. The guy seated right behind us said "Geez, I'm gonna get a Winnebago and park it on 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 spaces." His companion said "Oh, look at that adorable Shih Tzu in the window!" We didn't know whether to respond or not. I hope that guy saw us get off the bus and go to

that rig. For the record, Sam's rig is a gas powered Georgia Boy Cruise Master.

We left the lot thinking We'd come back later for the sunset activity the guide had mentioned but that didn't happen. As we drove out of the park, The line of vehicles coming in extended well beyond our campground a mile away! We realized how fortunate we were to have gone in at that unearthly hour. Guardian Angels at work again?

We settled down in the rig and had lunch while we cooled off and played with Paddy .

Around 5pm we went to the local IMAX Theater and watched a terrific, or was it horrific, film about white man's discovery of the Grand Canyon. About the one armed, civil war vet named Powell who led a party of explorers into the canyon and down the Colorado River. The river was treacherous and the film exciting. Much of it was done by airplane; breathtaking. However, it did not make me want to hike down there!

We stopped at the El Tovar Inn for coffee. Built in 1905, with gorgeous hand made dark wood columns and fixtures throughout, this is one of the first buildings erected at the canyon. many of our presidents have stayed here

Early the next day we entered the park on the bike and caught the tour bus. We saw more overlooks and walked a couple miles on trails. One trail took us out onto a skinny peninsula jutting right out into the canyon. We walked way, way out to a point. It was a half mile or more deep all around us. Not for the faint of heart. We could see the Colorado River down there, like a skinny piece of blue ribbon. An unbelievably beautiful scene.

on the other hand, our campground is not beautiful. Besides being hot, It's Dry camping: no water or hookups. The ground's so briary Paddy won't even come out! We must carry him to the road for a walk where He's had

to do his job right on the pavement. We'll have to retrain him when we get home.

The land between the Grand Canyon and Zion national Park is barren, to say the least. For miles and miles there's not a tree or anything but brown, dry brush. The ground is rough looking, flat and weed and thistle covered. As we rode along I thought I saw a little shack way out there with smoke coming from the chimney so maybe someone's cooking. A couple miles later WAS Another one. Then right along the road Were several little shacks with a flea market sign out front. Some of

our Native Americans actually live here. What a hard way of life.

Eventually we crossed the Colorado River at a tiny town called Page. At the bridge was a dam providing electricity. This little town had green trees and seemed normal with houses and such. It was weird after a hundred miles of dry dirt and rock. But then we were back to thistles and sand for many more miles

. As we approached Zion National Park, things began to change. We gained altitude and noticed big boulders and different rock formations. As we rose higher the formations grew more and more elaborate. All I could say was "Oh my God! It was a wonderland. We zigzagged up through these fabulous shapes through Switchbacks high above the canyon. Then we came to the entrance of a tunnel through the mountain! Before we could enter it with the rig, a ranger stopped us while he verified that no one was enroute at the time. They held traffic from coming at the other end so we could drive in the center of the tunnel where it was high enough to accommodate the rig.

We were the only vehicle in there.

Sam had to drive carefully. The tunnel is a mile long, curvy with three huge cutouts that let some light in. These big cutouts were made to get rid of the excess when the road was being cut through the mountain. It was a long, dark and spooky road.

Finally we were outside, at the highest point possible, looking down at the valley where our next campground awaited us. The ride down this side of the mountain was unbelievable. Driving the rig on this tiny road, switching back and forth into the canyon was quite a test for Sam. The mountains around us glowed and glittered in the late afternoon sunlight. Every turn of the wheels showed us another glorious scene. I was speechless. Nothing on earth could compare to this . He carefully maneuvered the rig down the little road but he couldn't keep his eyes off the surrounding magnificence either. He started to get the camera out…

" Oh no you don't! Keep your eyes on the road!"

Finally we were at the foot of The Watchman Mountain on The valley floor

This huge, red, flat sided formation seems to watch over the entire valley. We set up camp and sat outside having an iced tea. We just sat there for a while taking in the feeling of this place. There's a paved roadway and trees and neighbors but it's just so humbling to be here. All around us are naturally formed stone sculptures of every color. They glisten red from the iron, gold, brown, sand and black. As the sun goes down it all changes entirely. What a wonderful place.

We spent two days here hiking trails and doing a bus tour. I don't think anything on the rest of this trip can top this. These mountains are rock formations. Each one entirely different.

Many years ago Mormon elders happened onto this area and, amazed at the beauty and spirituality they felt, they named these formations with religious names like The great White Throne, Angel Face, and Angel's Landing . Three tall slender structures standing side by side are called The Patriarchs; named for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Another impressive part of Zion is called The Weeping Rock. Up a mountainside where it's cool and green. Our pathway took us to a grotto where we walked under the rock formation and felt water drip on us. They

say this water is melted snow that fell on the top of the rock over two thousand years ago. It takes that long to seep through the stone. Amazing.

We rode the motorcycle over that switchback road we'd come in on earlier. It was even more impressive and much more fun on the bike. You could do this road every hour and it would look different each time. The sun does wondrous things to the glitter and hues in the stone.

A history Note: Not so long ago, in 1995, there was a huge landslide here and a lot of things changed. Earth came crashing down, washing out a portion of the road causing the Virgin River to back up. Campers were evacuated. But that's how these canyons are formed. It took millions of years to get it as it is today. 1995 was just a blip in the scheme of things.

Pretty interesting, don'tcha think?

OK, one more thing and I'll get out of Zion:

It was about 7pm as we were walking with Paddy around the campground here on the valley floor. He'd walk all around us getting his leash tangled in our legs. Although the sun was still high and it was still bright daylight, the moon was shining brightly between two stone peaks right in front of us. It was unreal. We were enthralled in this beautiful phenomenon when suddenly I kicked Paddy right in his tootie as He squatted in front of me! Gads What a mess. My shoe and jeans and his butt were all smeared. It took us a while to quit laughing and clean the street!

But I'll never forget this visit to Zion National Park .

It will be the highlight of my life forever.

As I reread and reassemble these notes seven years and several western trips later, I admit nothing has ever replaced my amazement and love of Zion. A must on everyone's agenda.

There were so many other wonderful things to see and learn. I can't believe neither of us had ever heard of this place until my daughter mentioned it on the phone just the other day while we were at the Grand Canyon. That was Serendipitous. I'm thrilled we took the time. And thank you, Sam, for bringing us here. I'll never forget Zion National Park!

That wraps up our first month on the road. So far, so good. Only one broken toe and we're still smiling!

Note 21 years and much sightseeing later: Zion is still my most precious memory ever!.

June, 2004. Los Vegas & California

Much as we hated to leave this spiritual little spot in the world, the next morning we moved on.

And again; Mother Nature is unbelievable. Here we are in another awesome mountainous canyon. Every time we take a curve in the road there's a different vista in front of us. Beautiful rock; no vegetation, no greenery, just gorgeous rock hills and the river winding through.

We keep crossing over the Virgin River as it twists its way along. One minute we're riding with a stone wall next to us and suddenly As far as we can see, it's flat brown desert. Not a hill anywhere. Sand and sagebrush. Is that tumbleweed? It's amazing.

As we rode along toward Vegas I thought about how I'd always wanted to see Wayne Newton some day. I remember him as a child prodigy, Just my age, singing on TV. Well, we're here in Vegas. And so is he!

I pulled out my flip phone and called the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce to inquire. I was connected to a ticket outlet where I was shocked to fine that it cost 160 bucks per person and only the back rows were available. I said I'd think about it and disconnected. the next day I remembered the name of his own theater and called there. I learned that ALL tickets for his shows are 59.95!

And as a matter of fact, they had two recent cancellations in the front row. So I finally got to see Wayne. And at the very end of the show, with Sam shoving my arm up in the air along with all the other old biddies, Wayne touched me. How thrilling was that! Too bad this didn't happen thirty or forty years earlier when he could sing better.

Oh Well, better late than never.

This morning we started out early for the Hoover Dam. Neither of us has ever seen it

…. OK we saw it. Interesting as damns go. We did lunch in Boulder, Nevada, in the neat little Corner Cup Café. But we couldn't believe how hot it was riding back to the rig. Sam even quit talking. Your mouth dried out the instant you opened it. Can you imagine? We sat poolside in the afternoon with iced tea and our books. Relaxing. Our plan to go into Vegas for another evening went by the wayside as the temps hovered above 106 all evening.

Next we arrived in Canyon Country, California

and found my cousin Patty's house way up a steep, winding road in a lovely subdivision. Although the weather is similar, this is definitely not Florida. The houses are scattered throughout the hills, you can't even see your neighbor.

Patty shares this home with her daughter's family and her brother. She and I had a good visit while the guys and kids swam in their pool. So good to see everyone. Their house is perfect for them. Her daughter Pam and hubby Billy and their children have the upstairs, while her brother Kirk has his space and Patti has her suite, all sharing the common areas. It's bright, spacious

and comfortable. I'm happy for them. Paddington liked everyone; and they enjoyed him, as well.

The next morning everyone was busy with previous plans so Sam and I went into town and found breakfast at the oldest café in Las Angeles County; the Saugus. It's been there since 1886. Then we bought half price tickets to Magic Mountain at the local Ralph's Grocery Store and we were off to the roller coasters! What a great surprise. I had no idea we would be close to Six Flags Over California. We rode the DeJa vu; where you do the whole ride forward and then it goes straight up in the air only to fall back down and do the whole ride in reverse. Your feet hang loose and you feel totally alone. Very exciting.

And Ridley's Revenge, in which you stand rather than sit, was terrific while The Viper was quite rough. We got back to Patti's just in time to go to dinner at a Japanese Restaurant with the whole family. It was a fun, busy day and everyone was ready to crash by 9 pm.

In the morning we said goodbye. Our next stop, after getting the RV serviced , was Sequoia National Park. We set up at our campground, walked Paddy and relaxed a bit . The weather's been perfect: about 70. We haven't had a drop of rain since we left Missouri. Our first morning here we dressed in jeans, long sleeve tee shirts, denim shirts and leather jackets. We were going up the road. And I do mean up. As we went along it got colder and colder. We should have worn our leather chaps. Our legs were feeling the chill.

We were on a pretty two lane road in a park dense with very tall trees. As we went higher, the trees changed. They were tall, straight, and just as big around a hundred feet up as they were at their trunk. They had no limbs except at the very top, creating a kind of umbrella over the forest. The limbs up there are short and the greenery is close to the trunk. The forest is so dense there's just not enough room for the limbs to spread.

The most famous of the Sequoia trees is the General Sherman. At 275 feet tall and over 36 feet in diameter at its base it's the world's largest living thing. Taller than 27 elephants stacked up It's about 2700 years old now. , and it continues to grow! How big can it get?

The road here amidst these trees looks like a little pencil line drawn through the forest. You feel like a toy riding along this path. By the time we got to the visitor's center at the top it wasn't even 30 degrees! We lunched in the café up there and noticed a troop of Canadians on Honda Gold wings. Later, coming down the mountain we were stopped by construction. We'd have to wait 35 minutes. The next vehicles to come down were the troop of Gold Wingers. I asked them if they could handle a Harley leading them out of the mountain. They said probably.

Later at the rig, we were ready to relax outside in the warmth of the valley. We discussed the day's experiences with the recorder and a choice refreshment. It's neat to wander around with your pet and meet your neighbors, but I'm a little leery of this park. They have huge steel boxes with intricate locking systems on them. All food items must be kept inside if you don't want the bears to get them! Bears?! This is for folks in tents, Right?! You can bet I'm locking our doors tonight!

The next day we pulled out of the southern end of Sequoia, heading for the northern end. We had to drive about a hundred miles around the park because our rig is too big to go through it. These parks were created over a hundred years ago and people were not expected to arrive in their houses! We set camp up in Kings Canyon State Park, so named because the river that created the canyon is the King River. This park butts up with the Sequoia National Park which we'd just left. So today we took a scenic ride through the park, down through the canyon and on for many miles along the river. It was gorgeous with waterfalls all along the way. The road was winding but not sharp; no switchbacks, just a comfortable 36 mile ride to a place where we could sit for a while in the grass and enjoy an ice cream cone near the river.

Later that evening we had a campfire. We've been missing this. We watched the stars come out; me with a glass of wine and he with a beer. Perfect.

Sam had lived in his RV several years before we met. He bought his first motor home when he retired from General Telephone Electronics-GTE, and has enjoyed this type of living ever since.

I agree, the quiet trails in the woods can't be beat. it's a wonderful life. The folks we meet are doing what they want to do, stress free. Many volunteer a few hours a week in lieu of rent, staying put for a period of time. Then move on to another area.

It's a nice lifestyle. . but of course, there are rules… we got into trouble with a ranger one morning when we thought the quiet time was 9pm to 6am. Sam started the generator and made coffee around 7. Knock, knock. You'll have to turn your generator off till 9 am. Oops

Our next stop was Mariposa, or butterfly, California. I'd held off doing the laundry so we could do it here while I tried to locate a friend living somewhere nearby. We browsed around town a bit and finally I reached my girlfriend by phone. She used to live next door to me in Sarasota. Now she's on top of a mountain out here with no plumbing, a new baby, and bears! Not my cuppa. But to each his own.

Here was one of those great little surprises that just happen: As we were doing the laundry, we learned we could stay in the local fairgrounds, free, for a few days, with full hookups, while all kinds of activities were about to take place. Mariposa is a darling little western town. We met Harvey, a toothy, or is it toothless, old guy in charge of the fairgrounds. He told us the best places to eat and what was going to be happening. We brought him a super size rib dinner from his recommended pizza place. Actually, it was so good we ate there a couple times ourselves.

That Saturday was great. First the wagon train parade: we sat with others on the wooden boardwalk in front of the general store with our feet in the road. We watched as cowboys passed by, Then settlers in covered wagons pulled by mules brought down from Yosemite National Park trooped by, and Of course there were local dignitaries and politicians .

Later in the town hall were the poetry readings! Sounds pretty blah, eh? No, they were terrific. Kids and Adults entered the competition at their own levels. The theme this year was about Cowboys. They were fun and funny, serious and poignant, and from the heart. I must Mention just this one. It's about Willy:

. Willy sits in front of the fireplace lickin' himself in obscene places. He sniffs you when you come into the room. some times sticking his nose in your crotch nearly lifting you off the floor! (Oh gosh. I wish I could remember the rhyme of it.) There's a few more equally disgusting funny lines. As you get further into this rhyme and wrinkle up your nose with horrible laughter, you hear the last line…

If he wasn't my brother, I'd shoot him!

I screamed and nearly fell out of my chair!

This was followed that evening by a catered dinner. BBQ chicken, beans, etc. We'd already met some folks and had friends camping near us here in the fair grounds so had our own little party going on. Then there was a live music ho down and we danced till the wee hours,

What a great time we'd fallen into in Mariposa.

Sunday morning we moved on to Yosemite National Park. We left the rig in a Day camp area and hopped on the Harley to explore. We saw several great waterfalls; even hiked a bit to get to some of them but it was worth it. My favorite is always Bridal Veil Falls. The first time I saw one many years ago I didn't realize why it was called Bridal Veil. Now I get it.

Evidently there was no breeze at that time. As we stood looking up at the water tumbling out of the rock today, a sudden gust of wind blew against the water causing it to span out over the rock. As if the bride had suddenly started walking away. Her veil just flowed behind her. It was awesome.

We needed to stop for the night somewhere so Sam checked the Wally world map and found a place in Stockton. We pulled in and were nearly settled when a security girl came to us saying we couldn't stay here. She

was nice, THOUGH, and told us about another Walmart a short distance away. We drove to it and park the rig. A little Asian guy hurried up to us waving his arms. “You can’t stay here! “ Oh Geez, we thought. “You must go over there!” he pointed to a corner of the lot. Well, o k. they had a specific area for rigs. It was fine and by morning there were quite a few of us

. Little by little we’re learning the national Walmart camping rules.

The next day we arrived in Napa, found the welcome center and got info on the wineries. We passed through Helena and Calistoga on our way. I was in Calistoga with Laura years ago when she lived in San Francisco. At that time we did mud baths and massages and stayed at a bed and breakfast. It’s such a cute little town. Now Sam and I visited Beringer’s Winery and bought wine and tee shirts. They gave us each a glass of white wine. When everyone had their glass in hand, they instructed us on properly drinking it: Hold it this way, swirl it that way, smell the bouquet, and now sip it.…

Sip it? Sam says. It’s all gone! Sorry, no seconds. Then they gave us a sample of a red wine. This time the guys followed the lesson plan

We shopped for groceries keeping in mind our limited space on the bike. I sat behind Sam with a full bag in my lap. On top were precious potato chips that needed special attention to keep from being crushed. Sitting at the only red light in this tiny town, some guys loudly pointed out to Sam: Hey Dude! she’s back there eating all your chips!

Wow, its hotter than blazes out here ! Locals say it’s unusual. Still no rain. Everything is so dry. Next stop the Pacific Coast. Can’t wait. Looking forward to cooler weather.

Finally! We’re in Casper Beach RV Park on the Pacific Ocean and Yes, it’s COLD here!

Paddy went with us down the incline to the water. We’re on an inlet with light brown sand and rocks all around. Kids are playing in the waves in wet

suits. . Sam helped a 50ish gal with her kite. It was already about 400 feet up but she was all tangled up. Good guy that he is, he got her straightened out while her husband sat there reading.

Then we hopped the bike and went exploring. The road ran up to the top of the rock wall where you could look right down at our beach and campground. Parked up there was an RV with a Harley trailer. A couple sat on the edge of the cliff watching us below while having their lunch. Sam took their picture for them and we chatted a while. Like us ,they were in their early sixties, having a ball. Then we rode on up the road till it curved into the town of Mendocino. What a precious little town! All these stores with their white trim and picket fences and lots of bright colorful flowers everywhere. Here we are high on the bluff facing the pacific Ocean with a most Gorgeous view, but it's freezing up here! I thought flowers liked warm weather and sun! A shop Keeper told us about watching three whales cavorting with each other out in the ocean. . We rode around town a bit, found the library, and soon went to the rig for the night. The next day we rode north through Fort Bragg and beyond, To a place where humongous rocks jut up out of the ocean and thousands of sealions hang out around them, climbing and cavorting and entertaining folks watching from a huge deck on shore. They put on quite a show. But getting to this deck from the parking lot was interesting. We crossed a large prairie of tall grass where you were not allowed to walk on the ground because of the myriad of insects waiting to feast on you. Wooden walkways took you everywhere from the parking lot to the water. Seemed like miles of them crisscrossing over this meadow. Finally we arrived at the huge deck with benches and railings. Many folks milled around, watching the show out in the water. And what a show it was! Hundreds of sea lions frolicking out there, all watching us as we watched them! And lo and behold, people were talking on their cell phones! We discovered we, too, had cell power! Have I mentioned, cell phones are basically useless here in the far Northwest? Good only on the Interstates; and now we realize, they're also good here on the pier. We exchanged travel stories with folks quite a while as we watched the silly antics going on out in the water.

Next we visited a lighthouse. A sign said it was half a mile away so We followed the footpath and soon we were in a meadow of knee high grass again . This reminded me of Wuthering Heights. we walked across this field to the rim of the cliff. The path turned and we continued on. We could

see the lighthouse but signs said not to walk off the path as the grass was full of ticks and other fun things. Been there, done that.

Laura Ingalls would have been running through that field, though, with her bonnet a flying.

We went up in the lighthouse and learned a lot of local history

. Funny thing, though, when we came out through the exit, right there before us was a wide paved drive and the parking lot. Good grief.

We left Casper Beach in the morning and meandered up the coast. Off the main highway and on to the old 101 that winds through the Redwood trees. This awesome stretch of road is called the Avenue of the Giants. The little road actually seems to wiggle through the forest without disturbing any of the trees.

We found a place to pull off and walk around in there. It was breath taking. Then we rode along about 25 miles feeling like little mice on a tiny toy bike riding through this forest.

Eventually we were in bright daylight again and rode on up to Crescent City, California, not far from the Oregon border.

Our stopping place tonight is Sunset Harbor Park.

Paddington, our 25 pound Shih tzu, loves to watch out the window as we travel so we prepared a place for him between my seat and the wall, just below the side window. With an air mattress and a pillow and towels, It was perfect. Well heck, our buck fifty air mattress just isn't doing the trick. I keep stuffing more things down there but his little butt (little?) just keeps sinking out of sight. And it's no easy feat digging him out! Sam says next time he'll spring for a 5 dollar one!

we arrived at Crescent City tired and hungry. It was chilly as the fog rolled in. A dramatic change from the heat of last week. We had some Lipton soup and hot dogs, Then Sam had a bowl of cereal, who knows what's next?

We settled down to sleep. But as the night grew quiet we kept hearing a beep outside every few seconds. It sounded like someone trying to set up

his satellite system for his TV, but this went on and on till Sam went out to see if he could help. Usually he can set a system up in no time flat.

Note: Folks carried a portable TV antenna in their rigs and set it up outside to get a signal. It would beep the whole time it searched. Sometimes there was just no finding one , but Sam was usually very good at it. However, soon he came back in, looking a bit sheepish. That noise was a fog horn in the bay and it would continue all night! Oh goody.

Humbug State Park, Origan. Sam's target destination. he's been waiting for this. It's so beautiful here with grass and trees and pretty hedges providing privacy. There are neat trails and, of course, the ocean. And there's plenty of space for each rig. He'd volunteered out here in several locations previously and He couldn't wait to show me this wonderful area. So after setting up, we hopped the bike and rode to the Hughes House. This early pioneer family had settled much of this land. Sam was the tour guide here for a while

. Nearby is the Cape Blanco Lighthouse. While in this lighthouse you are at the furthermost Western point of the contiguous USA. We did a tour of it, climbing to the top where the huge Fresnel lamp is. We learned about the workings of the light itself. It's seven feet tall and five feet in diameter. All the prisms turn gently around a one thousand watt light bulb in the center. And it can be seen all the way to the horizon.

We rode on to Port Orford. Nothing much there. A rather depressed area. Oregon has little industry along this upper coast and these towns have very small populations. There's no sales tax in the state. and you cannot pump your own gas! That's neat in the RV but not so great for bikers. Most attendants hand the nozzle to a biker to pump his own gas. Ya know, guys with bikes don't want anyone touching their stuff.

The next day we stayed put in the park as the fog kept rolling in and out creating a damp chill. I made our desert tea from Albuquerque and we huddled around the fire. When neighbors came we put out more chairs and everyone shared their travel stories with a cuppa hot tea.

We walked to our little inlet, passing through a 25foot gap in the rock formation. This gap was littered with huge dead tree trunks that had obviously been scattered about for eons. They looked like pickup sticks tossed to the ground. I wondered where they had come from.

Then we saw a sign telling us a tsunami could come through here with little to no warning. It said Go to high ground! Oh goody. How would we ever climb these boulders several times taller than we are? And by now we all know about tsunamis.

Nevertheless, we traversed the gap and arrived on the other side. A cute little cove awaited us. Near the water. We found neat artifacts and colorful, smooth round rocks.

I selected a few and put them into one of my never ending supply of poop bags.

Later, as we made our way back to the rig, Sam marching along out front of Paddy and me, I tripped on something and down I went. Those rocks clattered together onto the pavement and Sam came running. Forgetting I'd collected rocks, he thought he heard bones shattering! ! He was petrified. We laughed when we realized all I had was a skinned knee.

On to Portland. We'd crossed a mountain ridge and everything changed again.

Chilly and foggy are out, hot and sunny are in again . And is it ever hot!

We arrived at our newest headquarters in Portland, Rolling Hills RV Park, a nice private park with a swimming pool and luscious green grass everywhere. About 8 miles from Laura's apartment. We set up camp and left a message that we're here. Soon she called and we got together with a bottle of wine. Her apartment building is a large red brick complex with lots of green lawn and trees. An older place, it seems secure and comfortable.

Since she'd work the next day, Sam and I rode to Oregon City and toured the end of the Oregon Trail. We attended a lecture and a movie and inspected many artifacts. There is so much history to learn.

That evening the three of us went in search of KFC for Sam who's been craving this indelicacy for weeks. Instead we found a neat place nearby with 'good home cookin.'. Vinny's was a nice place and Our waiter, the son of the owners, flirted with Laura by offering a free lunch the next day in hopes of seeing her again.

I dunno bout that.

2004 June. Portland, Mount Saint Helen and Mount Rainier.

We're in Portland for a few days. Laura finished her employment with Nordstrom's and has the next four days free. We had pancakes galore at Fat Albert's this morning. Then I met some of her Nordstrom coworkers while she took care of business. Monday she'll start a new position with a better salary. When we finally got back to the rig Sam had a steak dinner prepared to go on the grill. This turned into a riot!

He had fired up his little grill on the campground picnic table. Then he realized we needed that table to eat on. Quickly he moved the grill to a smaller table and we stepped inside to collect things for dinner. Laura glanced out at the sizzling grill.

"Mom, look! Fireballs are dripping from the grill! Flames began hissing and shooting. Oh good grief. It's the plastic table! It was too funny. He'll never live that one down.!

But the dinner was perfect. Oh my gosh, better than any dinner in any restaurant. We ate on the picnic table under a tree and it was fabulous. Then Laura read us some of THE articles she'd written for a class she's taking at the University. They were stories from her childhood and we laughed so hard our sides ached. It was the best evening ever.

The next day Sam had a toothache and decided to get it fixed while here in the city. Paddington had an appointment at the beauty shop and spent the

whole day there. Laura and I rattled around in town. Nails, hair, shopping and more shopping. We found bargains at Nordstrom's basement store-The Rack. A fun day for everyone. Oh, maybe not so for Sam. Upon returning home, with a gorgeous Paddington in tow, we learned that Sam had had the offending tooth pulled. He was resting comfortably and had enjoyed the peace and quiet all afternoon.

June 26 Saturday My Birthday. I'm 60!! We did breakfast at Uncle Vinney's, that little restaurant we'd found recently. Ray waited on us again and he kept bringing me scratch off lottery tickets. Wouldn't it have been wonderful if only…

He's funny. He says if we come back tomorrow, it's on him! But we know he just wants to see Laura again. Later we drove up a scenic highway and saw several waterfalls and pretty overviews of the area. Then we had an ice cream before heading back

We went to the pool in the early evening. It was full of kids celebrating a birthday. We sat in the shade and watched. The dogs weren't allowed in the pool area so they sat in the grass outside the fence and look pleadingly at us. Then we went for Pizza! This restaurant has a huge stuffed grizzly bear in a glass case. I don't know what the point of that was.

We were tired; went home and watched a little Court TV.

The next morning we did laundry while hanging out at the pool. Laura brought us some Trader Joe's soup and a lovely Tiramisu and a ton of fruit. A great lunch with leftover pizza and spaghetti. Seems like we spend a lot of time eating. Afterward Sam and Laura washed her car. She can't go to a new job with a dirty car! We cooled off again at the pool along with some loud, obnoxious adults who were noisier than all the kids at yesterdays party!

So guess what we did then … dinner again at Uncle Vinney's. With no fish on the menu we ordered meatloaf and whatever. Halfway through, Ray brought me a lovely piece of fish explaining they're putting it on the menu soon. How sweet. Then we were off to Walmart looking FOR a window fan for her apartment and a new folding table to replace that poor

thing from the other evening. Needless to say, we purchased an aluminum one.

Early the next morning Sam and I got on with our travels leaving Laura to get on with her life.

We arrived at the Mount Saint Helen visitors Center and left Paddy guarding the rig while we rode the Harley up to see the remains of this mountain. It was 49 miles from here to the Johnson Center. So named after the volcanologist who was there monitoring the activity.

Here he pronounced his last words: “Vancouver, Vancouver, this is it!”

They’ve built miles of road for us to get there to see the devastation. It looks like a war zone. This used to be a beautiful, fertile area with a lake at the foot of the mountain and a park where local folks came to camp and enjoy nature.

Our viewing point is four miles away from the mountainside and the devastation continues far beyond us . They’ll never know how it happened; did The mountain top slide down the side like a landslide first or did an earthquake cause the slide? All recording equipment was lost.

The volcano blew the side out at such ferocity rocks and trees and debris went flying at over 700 MPH. Johnson saw it start and was instantly caught up in it.

It spewed for over nine hours. Ash encircled the entire globe. For over six years activity continued here. Unlike a Hawaiian volcano, The lava of this volcano is very thick. It doesn’t run down for miles around. Instead, it bubbles up creating a dome, like a blister, that finally bursts and drains a little. Then it heals and fills again. It’s hard to believe it but again, this is but a blip in the life of our planet.

What’s with Sam? He was up at 5 am! I rolled out around 9. We put stew on in the crock pot and rode up Mount Rainier on the bike. We were gone

about seven hours so it was quite a ride. We took a loop road up to the top where we threw snowballs at each other, then down the other side. Good to see this beauty right after yesterday's drama and devastation . We stopped in Packwood at the library and caught up on computer stuff, and at the grocery so we can continue to eat. Shopping is interesting with only saddle bags... should we get milk

... or beer?

Our stew was great and over dinner WE Aaltered our plans a bit. We were heading to Glacier National Park but decided instead to go back to Portland and have the 4th of July with Laura. So we stayed here near Mount Rainier a few more days with these fun campers.

One night we sat out while a fellow quietly played a dulcimer in the background and we sang along with him. Everyone exchanged stories and tidbits. Several very excited couples were on their way to Alaska. One evening the campfire was at our place and everyone laughed and joked and told stories till about 11 pm. Pretty late for a bunch of old codgers, don'tcha know.

2004 July. Snake River, Yellowstone and Sturgis.

We spent the first few days of July back in Rolling Hills with Laura and the pool. We didn't do anything but laugh and swim and goof around. A really great visit with her. It was good for all of us. She and Sam hit it off right from the start: not the usual thing with my boyfriends. That made it perfect.

After the 4th we left Portland to get on with our travels, arriving at Wallowa Lake State Park in eastern Oregon. What a joyous place this is! This lake's about five miles long and you must drive the length of it to get to the park entrance. Folks are swimming and picnicking and enjoying life. Lots of kids, yet it's peaceful and quiet here. This is the end of a long holiday week end. We attended a ranger lecture last evening up the hill in an amphitheater. Sam had been in shorts all day and didn't bother to change as dusk settled in. He about froze his little knee caps off when the sun went down during the lecture.

The next evening: Wow! I'm not sure if I'm wowing the fact that we completed a 200 mile bike ride or If I'm exclaiming over everything we saw and did today. We went to Hell's Canyon.

It was very chilly early this morning so we layered our clothing. At one point we were on a trail carefully zigzagging down the side of a mountain. no guard rails and no other people. But it was so beautiful. Sam's a terrific driver and very careful. Not into speeding. And I always make sure our Guardian Angel has a spot on the bike with us.

Before long we were in the canyon riding alongside the Snake River. We had turned at Oxbow, a tiny cluster of buildings where there's a saloon and a couple other little businesses. Not really a town. We'd crossed the Snake River and were in Idaho. From here the canyon walls jut straight up into the sky.

We were lucky to be there as the sun was directly overhead so it was sunny and bright the whole time. As it got hotter we'd removed most of our gear. We were in the bottom of the canyon. I was down to the last shirt, a favorite white pullover with a boat neck and three quarter length sleeves and a Winnie the Pooh emblem on the left front.

I was riding along thinking how neat it would be to get a Harley insignia to cover Winnie.

I put my hand on Winnie and… What? Where's Winnie? He wasn't there!

I felt the back of my right shoulder and there he was! Geez, I'm riding on a Harley with my shirt on backwards. I pulled my arms out and turned it around. Aaah… much better.

It was eerily quiet down there though… We were alone. The only two people in the world.

The river raced by, but it was absolutely silent; serene within its own smooth rock bed. The road seemed level with the river in the bottom of this huge canyon. A gorgeous ride! . We went along beside this gently curving river for about 25 miles. So quiet. a whole different world. All around were cliffs and mountain walls. Eventually we came to Hell's Canyon Dam where the power works are located. And there in a tiny little building was a

Visitor’s Center where, once again, we had an ice cream cone as we sat near the water.

They had boat rides on the other side of the dam if you had the time for a nice leisurely cruise. Further down the Snake River, the rapids are a level four; level6 is a waterfall! But we needed to get back before dark and it was quite a long ride. On our way we stopped at the Oxbow Café fora Hamburger. Then head for home. What a gorgeous day. We’re not die hard bikers: 200 miles is a long ride. Hope I can walk tomorrow!

2004 July. Here’s some funny-strange things we’ve seen in our travels :

We were in the motor home, no one around for miles, alone on a very wide nicely paved road coming down a side of a canyon on our way to Wyoming. But what’re we seeing? What is that on the road way down there ?

Is it Animals? After a couple more twists and turns we came up to a cow walking down the highway! We carefully passed it and Turn again and there were three more cows! Look, There’s two more running! A whole herd was gallivanting around on the highway. What a weird sight.

Another time on highway 12 in Idaho, We were riding along at the bottom of Clearwater Canyon. The road was perfectly flat alongside the edge of a river. There was no actual land between our rig and the water. This river’s about fifty yards wide and is just a rock bed, very shallow.

Occasionally a little waterfall creates a small eddy in front of it.

I wonder what happens if it floods around here. It’s really neat to drive right alongside it like this though. Kind of mesmerizing.

Yellowstone National Park. Another strange place. I listened to the lecture and still don’t know if a volcano took the top off a mountain and left this flat, thermal steamy surface or what. The ground around here looks like it’s

soft, dirty white and lightly crusted, with holes in some places and little caverns in places and hot spring pools in other places. But if you put your foot down on this surface you might sink into it and it would be very hot beneath that crust. Therefore, they've provided boardwalks throughout the area so you can safely view these activities. Whether they're geysers or springs or just a hot bubbling pool depends on the way things are formed beneath the surface.

Geysers have a particular plumbing that blocks the steam until a certain pressure is attained. Then it blows through. Some do this every few days and some every few years. Old Faithful does it most regularly. The ground is mostly white with grey smears and variations of rust and red from iron. It seems weird to us, like from another planet, but that's the nature of Mother Nature.

The rest of the park seemed disappointing to me . Everywhere we rode was strewn with felled trees and dead tree stalks. Over five years earlier, in 1998, a devastating fire burned them out and Dead trees lay everywhere: along the roads , up the hillsides and tumbled on top of each other with little foliage anywhere. Every here and there we passed a cops of live trees and then more dead ones. It was depressing. I understand they leave the trees for nature to take care of itself and that the insects and animals will use them. But, we also learned that the park was offered 60 million dollars for them. Seems like they might have struck a deal.

We went out the western entrance of the park to the city of West Yellowstone. This park is in Wyoming and this city is in Montana. Such a cute cowboy town. We went to the IMAX and saw a film about Yellowstone. Good way to learn stuff. Sam still craving KFC but no luck. Got some big old sandwiches from Buckaroo Bill's and took them home for dinner.

Paddington is having a problem. He pooped in the RV three times now. Poor baby.

We had a beautiful campfire and a drink and enjoyed the evening loving on him.

The next morning we left out the east side of Yellowstone. It was nicer there with little sign of the fire but rockier and more cavernous. Drove most of the day and stopped in Cody, Wyoming for groceries and such. Sam's better but now I have his cold. We stayed at the Walmart and I slept sitting on the couch, stuffed up and unable to breathe, Listening to a book. Today we passed through mile after mile of flatlands. Meadows, or is it prairies? I guess we've seen the last of the rocky cliffs and deep canyons.

But Then, there they were again! You know, after living in Florida 40 years where everything is sea level, this is such a treat. I can't get enough. Now we're near Rapid City and Mount Rushmore, South Dakota.

Our new campground is called…yup,

Rush no More campground. , This is a super friendly place to spend a few days. the laundry room has a swing nearby to use while waiting on your clothes. Nice swimming pool also. They even offer breakfast in the morning for a small fee. But all this for 11 bucks. Very nice.

We rode into Sturgis, the Harley Rally Kingdom. We're about three weeks early, thank goodness. We bought some nifty shirts for ourselves and friends. I was looking for a leather jacket but no luck.

Then we rode to Deadwood, the home of Wild Bill Hickock. They have the very chair in which he was shot to death, enshrined in one of the saloons. This is a pretty good feat since the entire town burned down a few years after his death in 1876. . I guess someone saved that chair! The town was rebuilt around 1897. Our guide on this tour was a history teacher full of information. He pointed out that Kevin Costner did Dances With Wolves there and how he's created a shrine to himself in the top floor of the hotel. Evidently our driver didn't care much for Costner. We learned that Wild Bill was really a good guy, a good sheriff, and led a decent life. He and Calamity Jane were never friends and he'd roll over in his grave if he knew they'd buried her right next to him! They say her whole life was a calamity.

We stopped for a beer and some hilarious entertainment by Yancy something or other. . Deadwood is known for its gold. In fact it got its name when a miner returning to Rapid City to file his claim told folks: "Thar's gold up thar in them dead woods."

FYI: Deadwood was the first city in the US, outside of Vegas, to legalize gambling.

Yea , Paddy didn't poop inside today. Hopefully he's feeling better. We bought some pet pampers till the poor baby gets over this problem. Had a cool one, and crashed.

Today we saw Chief Crazy Horse. This granite mountain is being carved into the likeness of peacemaker Chief Crazy Horse. The Native American tribes of the west got together in 1948 and selected this great leader to represent all Native Americans with this monument. This statue is larger than Mount Rushmore!

We rode the wildlife loop in Custer State park, where we saw everything from prairie dogs to the Buffalo herd. It was bright and sunny and we were in our souvenir tee shirts. A Glorious day.

Just before leaving the park we decided to ride to "the Needles". These very skinny, tall stone formations are at the top of a mountain in this park. They point to the sky and you can ride around between them. As we turned to go up the road, a ranger stopped us to tell us it was very cold and HAILING up there. Here we are in tee shirts. We put on denim shirts and our rain gear and off we went. It got colder and darker as we ascended. Then rain drops, then hail!

Soon the ground was covered white and little pellets were pinging off Sam's helmet right into my face. It was exhilarating to say the least. I put gloves on. Sam didn't have any rain pants and the water from both our jackets ran down into his bike seat. His jeans got soaked and frozen. Oh my Poor baby. Thus, we experienced " the Needles."

We went down the other side. By the time we got to the highway we were sweltering And stripped back to tee shirts! Wow. The wonders of Nature!

The next morning we head for Sioux Falls, South Dakota, about 350 miles away.

But just as we settled in at the local Walmart there , things started falling apart. The clothes rack in the closet fell down and all the clothes had to be removed to fix it. Sam reinforced the brackets and I put everything back in place. It was hot in the Parking lot and now the A/C wouldn't come on. He investigated and discovered no TV, no microwave or coffee pot. Flipped the breaker, nothing.

So much for sitting back with a cool one after a long drive.

He got some equipment out and fiddled with stuff Narrowing it down to the generator. Called the manufacturer, went outside, touched something and Viola! POWER! My hero!

We were in a humongous Walmart lot adjacent to an equally huge Sam's Club lot. On our way in we'd noticed a Pizza place at the edge of this lot. We were hungry. but they're not allowed to deliver in a lot. O K. Let's walk over and get one. But I swear it was a mile away.

We got the pizza and trudged back across that concrete desert. Then, just as we approached the rig , I noticed a red and white stripe awning right in front of us. Oh no. Could that be a KFC?! And it's right here?!

Yep. Sam's been dying for that delicacy ever since Portland, and here we are with all this Pizza. And why didn't we just drive the rig closer to that pizza shop in the first place? Huh?

Next, we arrived at the Basswood RV Resort in Kansas City. Sam was busy for two days with the sale of his mother's Tampa house. He worked through a pile of paperwork faxed to him here. Then he took it to Platt City to be notarized and FedEx picked it up. An intense time for him, but how neat that this could be completed from across the country with electronics. We live in a great time.

Our next destination was Saint Louis, Missouri, to see the arch, but we didn't get to go up in it. The parking area for big rigs was busy with a fiesta of some sort so we moved on to a Walmart for the night.

The next morning was interesting. Sam was up around 5 or so and had already made coffee. When I got up at 7 he was just getting back from Wally World with an armload of oil and stuff. He said he'd stow it in the belly of the rig until we were in a campground where he wanted to change the oil and check everything out. I said O K. I'll warm the coffee, we can walk Paddy and get on the road.

I set two cups in the microwave and pressed two buttons to start the generator and the microwave. But a second later both shut down. Then I heard pounding on the outside of the rig: bam Bam bam!

What the heck? I ran outside. Sam was standing at the rear of the rig… "What's all the…

I started to ask. Then I saw him. His ballcap, his eye lashes and his chin were dripping with oil and his shirt was soaked. Behind him the trailer was also drenched and running with oil.

What in the world?… ?! He glared at me. With gritted teeth, he pronounced "Gail, I'm in the generator. I'm checking the oil. You can't use the generator when I'm checking the oil in it!!" He looked so funny standing there saturated. I covered my mouth as if I was appalled at this horrible thing but didn't want him to see me struggling to keep a straight face. It was too funny. "Now I'll have to go back in and get more oil." He grumbled as he wiped his face and marched back into the store. The clerk who'd waited on him an hour ago just looked at him and asked, "Do you need some oil, sir?"

We scrubbed the trailer down and his clothes finished the trip in a bag beneath the rig.

Remember reader, we were about a week into this trip when I rolled the steps in and he broke a toe. Now we're about a week from home and he's covered in oil. I dunno, but I don't think he'll be taking me on any more trips.

But we know he said he'd stow that oil and do it when we settled in a campground. right?

OK. Moving on to Tennessee the next day, we arrived at the Nashville RV Resort and Chilled out for a while. Then we connected with a City tour in town. Our guide was a short, round, fun little gal named Suzy and I fell in love with Nashville. It's cool, green and comfortable here. I loved the history of the city and how they preserve it. I have only good feelings about this town. every Friday the street down by the river is closed off and people dance all night. A fun place.

But it's a long drive from Nashville to Georgia and we were anxious to get there. We camped for a few days at Unicoi State Park where Sam volunteered several seasons during the past few years. I met his friends Art & Pat and Gene & Eileen and sat around their campfire till late one evening. Art & Pat live about 20 miles from us in Florida but they'd spent the whole summer here in Georgia. Wow, I thought. What a fun thing to do. We made plans to see them later, when we'd all be back in south Florida.

2004 July. Sam's 60th Birthday! He's caught up with me an By Golly we simply must find some KFC for this guy! We left Georgia, heading for home in Sarasota. We began the search, determined to get some of that elusive fried chicken for his birthday.

Hallelujah! We found it in a gas station and ate it right there in the parking lot!! Happy Birthday Sam!

Good to be home. Plans are already flying around about the future. We can go to the mountains for September and October as volunteers. We'll see these friends as we make more new ones. We can plan a trip for next summer to see everyone in the Northeast. We could go to all the wonderful historic places from here to Maine, visiting more of our families along the way! Traveling this way is fabulous! Oh YES, I'D do it again in a heartbeat!

This trip was 8,765 miles. A year ago I couldn't imagine all the sights, the fun and the excitement just waiting for us. Thank God and our own little cupid, Nancy, for bringing this all together. And, as amazing as it seems, Sam still wants me to go with him again, where ever in this whole big country we decide to go! For now we'll relax and enjoy Sarasota for a while.

2004 August. This month was busy. Great to be back. Everything was fine here at the house. Rick was glad to have us home again. I had a couple changes of tenants but everything went smooth as silk. I rented the second bedroom to a fellow named Thomas, 43, a quiet, gentle person who had been hit by a car some time ago and walks with a cane. He came to me after living at the Salvation Army for a while. My other newby is an older gent in the apartment. He seems quiet and polite and quite refined. Both these guys have no car. Rick doesn't drive and I don't so there are four of us with no vehicles. But Sam's moved in with me and he has a car and a motorcycle with a trailer. It all works out.

We've had fun with friends and the bikes , but most of this month was spent right here at the computer transcribing my travel notes. It's taken a long time to write everything up; it's a book!

Since we've been back, Sam's detailed the motor home from top to bottom while I worked in the house and yard. The weeds were way overgrown and many good plants had died.

WHY is that? ?

Before the end of the month Sam received a call from Unicoi and they do need volunteers for September and October. Oh good! Let's get started! So we spent the next two months volunteering in the Georgia mountains. We worked various jobs in lieu of payment for our campsites. What a great way to spend autumn. The other volunteers were fun folks and we did lots of socializing with them. Motor cycle riding, camp fires, and the confidence building Rogue's course, to name a few of our activities.

This luscious campground is at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains just three miles from Helen, Georgia. It was fabulous watching the leaves change colors. You just don't see this in Florida!

Helen is a little Alpine Village nestled in the foothills of these mountains. The Chattahoochee River passes right through town. It looks like a Christmas card, it's so darn cute. They have Octoberfest with live German music nightly through fall at the fest hall. We went often and now have the chicken dance down pat. Sam kept the Trading Post open 20 hours a week and he's always helping everyone he can in every way. I kept the campsites in our loop clean with the gas blower and even cleaned the fire rings between campers. It became practically impossible to keep up as October rolled around and campers and leaves rolled in in droves. But we did our best.

Friends came by for a few days and tented near our rig. We rode the bikes to Highlands, NC, and other places in the countryside. There are so many beautiful water falls and gorges and winding roads around here it's just fun to be out there and see everything.

We took them to the fest hall to dance and we browsed around in Helen several times.

One day we went off to Alexander's, a huge store out in the country where you can find anything and everything From slippers to furniture and appliances. Even guns! it's always fun to browse there. But as we rounded the last curve and it came into view sprawled across the huge meadow, we realized it was closed! Well dang! Sunday. Baptist Country.

We were dying of thirst and getting hungry so headed for T W O. That's Two Wheels Only. A restaurant that caters to Bikers.

Folks were milling about so it looked hopeful but they wouldn't be open for two more hours. We used their outdoor facilities and went on to Helen. My famous last words were "With our luck today , Helen will be closed also."

But, Oh good. Helen was bustling with folks. We sat at a cute little out door restaurant and ordered drinks and lunch. Our drinks came promptly. Music was being played by a single guitarist and all was right with the world. Suddenly there was a loud boom followed by silence. There was no power.

This whole end of town was out. No food could be prepared. We gave up, finished our drinks and went home. Evidently that day wasn't meant to be a great one.

By the way, if you're wondering what a Rogue's course is, let me explain.... This program is designed to build team strength, confidence and trust. Several functions are performed as a team. In this case it took place in the woods near the Unicoi Lodge. One of the functions we performed was called simply "The Log". There was a long beam about 6 inches wide and afoot or so off the ground. We lined up on the beam side by side. It held all eight of us easily. Now without falling off, we put ourselves in alphabetical order. It was fun helping each other crawl over or under one another and not touch the ground. We did it! Then on to the next challenge:

there are three platforms in a row about six feet apart. We all stood on the first platform and by using a plank, which did not quite reach across the span to the next one, we had to get everyone over to that platform without touching the ground. Then do it again to the last one. It took a while but we did it. And so on through several more challenges.

Sam's known some of these folks several years. Ken & Karen from the Clearwater area, Tommy & Jackie from Alabama, and Gene and Eileen are local. All nice folks. we saw everyone regularly as we walked Paddington around the half mile loop twice a day. He began to look a little slimmer but then began demanding more food!

We thought we might have a cookout in Sarasota in late January to invite some of these new friends along with

the local folks. They all want to see where Sam's living since he deserted them.

When we got back from the mountains in November I was concerned about my stomach. I'd been having nausea attacks All year. I thought it might

have begun when I got so sick cleaning the apartment after Fred's expulsion last November. I was down ten days then. And a month later was sick three more days. I've been popping Pepcid AC like candy all year. My doctor wanted me to see a gastro internist for a couple tests. I agreed, but in the meantime Doc Schwimmer, my holistic chiropractor, thought it was something to do with the pancreas. I took some core level pancreas pills and was fine... never did get those recommended test done.

2004 December. It looked like it was going to be a rough season for my girls.

Kim's situation with Loyd was coming to a climax and Laura simply had nothing going on in Portland for the holidays so she came home. Sam and I picked her up in Tampa and we had an early celebration at Kim's.

This was especially good for the girls. Sam spent one night with us and then drove on to Mississippi for a week at his own daughter's house. Planning the days together in Gainesville became a fun time rather than a dreaded one for the girls. After several days Laura and I rented a car and drove to Sarasota in a blinding rain storm, listening to Car Talk on NPR. The trip passed quickly. We had Christmas dinner at Demetrio's Pizza with a hundred other folks. It had been a nice relaxing visit and she flew back to Portland on the 29th.

On New Year's Eve Sam & I went with L & E to the new Moose Hall in Bradenton. The music was great and we had a terrific time. Thus ended 2004

It had been the best, most exciting year for Sam and me. Besides celebrating our 60th birthdays that summer, we had our first anniversary Thanksgiving Day. And we look forward to more great times together. Sam is definitely the most wonderful guy I've EVER come across!

2005 January. We're home in Sarasota now, playing and planning.

We had a cookout for some of our camping friends and locals : Art & Pat, Al & Audrey, Ken & Karen, Pam & Russ, Liz & Ed and my current tenants Spence

& Angie, all from different parts of the country. It was fun. The food and activities were great. Everyone enjoyed the day.

Yard work never ceases in Florida but we plod along. We chopped down a humongous ginger plant, and had to dig and literally hack out it's root system. It was quite a chore, but we won! Then we spread pine bark in all the gardens and the yard was pretty again.

We've been to several plays at the Oslo Theater lately. One of them, "The Smell of the Kill", was fabulous. Kind of Dark humor. Three women chat in the kitchen while their husbands accidentally get stuck in the new meat locker in the basement. They calmly discuss the pros and cons of letting them out or going for a walk…

One day Sam and I rode northern Florida's back roads on the bike. A great ride; just beautiful. I never knew where the Florida Sheriff's Boys Ranch was till that day. We went out Bee Ridge road and turned north on a country road. It was pretty, so pleasant. lunch at the' Roaring Twenties Pizza and Pipes' was unique. The super high walls in this building Are lined with very tall organ pipes creating the most beautiful music.

2005 February. One Saturday at the regular hot dog fest at Rossiter's Harley dealership, we met a couple new to biking. A week later we planned a ride with them and with L&E to the north end of Longboat Key for lunch. We got only as far as downtown Sarasota when our bike went dead. We pushed it off the road and the guys took the seats apart and worked on the battery connections. Got it going, put it together, and two seconds after I sat down on the back seat it quit again. They did this three times, fixing a wire each time. But as soon as I sat down …dead again. Is my patootti just too hot for this bike? Finally they all went off to lunch while we hobbled home

2005 March. We trailered the bike to Daytona and parked the RV in the driveway of a gal who rented us that spot for a few days. Her house is right across the A1A from the Atlantic Ocean . We were there for bike week but took time every morning for a walk on the beach with a cuppa coffee and Then off to town. came back with four tops and a vest. And Sam had two new shirts. A total success and a good time. The weather was bright and crisp. We visited all his haunts and kicked lots of tires. On our last evening we went to the Moose for agood dinner. Enough already of the hot dogs and pizza.

One not so great note; We burst the water tank in the RV while we were there.

Having it worked on now , but it will cost a pretty penny to replace. Don't mention this to anyone, but we'd gone for our morning beach stroll while a hose was filling our water tank. The tank was closed. Oops. Not any more!

Note: Sam didn't like losing water every time he went uphill on mountain roads so he found a way to close the tank. Not a good idea.

2005 April. Beautiful cool mornings and sunny afternoons. Yesterday we rode the bike to Sharkey's on Venice beach to attend The annual shark tooth festival. In the midst of all the food, drink, arts and crafts concessions, we actually learned a lot about why Venice Florida gets dark sand and all the shark teeth while the rest of Florida gets no shark teeth and has such fine white sand.

Some of these teeth were 8 or 9 inches long and about 5 inches across the top. I asked how big the animal must have been to have such big teeth and was told he was about 60 feet long! As big as a school bus!

One evening at our Oslo Theater we saw Shakespeare's Midsummer's Night's Dream. It was hilarious. Pure Shakespearian dialog with modern dress and props.

Then Sam brought home a copy of the original Midsummer's Night's Dream. I'm being inundated!

We began working on our itinerary for a trip to the Northeast this summer. . We'll leave in May and head North to Saint Augustine, stopping to see relatives, historic places, and tourist traps along the way. Our first real commitment will be in June at the Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston where I've scheduled an appointment. We also plan to be in Ohio in July for a family pig roast . The rest of the time we'll fly by the seat of our pants. I love planning these trips.

2005 May. Florida, Georgia & South Carolina.

Today we begin. Due to weather predictions, Harley is out, the Jeep is in.

. Getting out of town was tricky. In fact, we almost couldn't get out of the driveway! Our street was all torn up for the installation of new water lines, a job that's been ongoing over four months now! This is a normal, one block long residential street with sidewalks and curbs. My neighbors and I each have mounds of soil and gravel stacked on our lawns. The workers installed pipes twice before and are now on the third set. Everything still leaks. The end of my driveway is gone. cut away. We managed to drive the RV over the mess onto the concrete near the house and we were finishing the packing.

Paddy sat in his co pilot's seat watching out the window when suddenly they were ready to pour cement!

Quickly Sam drove Big Bertha over the bumpity driveway and into a parking lot two blocks away and we finished loading up long distance. But, all's well that ends well. we pulled out at 10am, Heading up I75 singing… " On the Road Again" with Willie Nelson .

Of course, our first stop was Kim's house in Gainesville. That evening we met with Pat & Art for dinner. We'd met them just last year at Unicoi where we volunteered together. . Like me, they have a daughter who's a nurse and has a family in Gainesville. We all met at Leonardo's Italian Restaurant. And like us, They were stopping over for the night on their way to their Georgia retreat.

The next morning we hit the road, crossed Florida and stopped at the Wally world in Brunswick, Georgia for the night. In the morning we left Paddy in the rig and drove by car to Saint Simon's Island. Here we found the ruins of Fort Frederica. This was a British fort back in 1733 when they had battles with the Spaniards from the fort in Saint Augustine.

Fort Frederica was basically gone except for one brick wall, but the foundations were still there and Its history was interesting.

I'd read Eugenia Price's book about the lighthouse on Saint Simon's Island and was determined to see it if we could. We actually toured it and learned more of our country's history. Eugenia Price's historic novels of this area during America's early settlement are fabulous.

After lunch we headed up the mainland to a rice plantation called the Hoffyl-Broadfield House. Did you know, before tobacco and cotton, our main crop was rice? Slaves brought this crop, and their knowledge of it, with them from Africa.

This house was lovely. For many years the last family members, two unmarried sisters, lived there and enjoyed the niceties of life. The last one died in 1973 and left the home to the state of Georgia.

When you drive up to these old homes you approach from the rear, passing the out buildings and gardens. You walk around to the large front porch which faces the intercoastal waterway or an inlet. Remember, in those days all traffic was on the water. Although this family seemed to be isolated in this remote region, they were quite sophisticated and social. They had friends from Washington, Philadelphia and New York. The girls had opportunities for marriage but preferred their lives as they were. They played music and read and partied and traveled. The home was left exactly as they had been living there. Much of the beautiful furniture was antique even back in their day.

Colonial Williamsburg. The History of a Patriot. As you enter this area you first watch this film. It helped us understand all we were about to see here. After viewing it we walked down a path through a woods right into the past and emerged from the trees into a town over 200 years ago… here we learned to make bricks and wheels and carriages, to cook over a hearth with our pans practically on the floor, We've listened to trials in the courthouse, plays at the outdoor theater, and the wailing of an inmate at the asylum.

We visited the Governor's mansion with all its wonders; including a huge maze in the gardens where we nearly got lost. We visited William and Mary College where Thomas Jefferson and many of our forefathers were educated. We sat in on a discussion at the House of Burgess about the recent Boston Tea Party. We ate candy from the candy store as we talked with the silversmith and the gunsmith. We visited the original Protestant Church that's still in service today with its current congregation. What a wonderful experience this was. I can't believe I'd never heard of this place before.

Next, in Jamestown Virginia, We learned about what our forefathers endured when they came to this new land. We watched a film about the 109 men who arrived here in 1607. Many were gentlemen sent by the king which means they didn't expect to dirty their hands with menial labor. The rest, farmers and laborers, had no idea what they were getting into. By the end of the first year, half were dead from cold, sickness and starvation. The rest were giving up when more arrived to help.

This is a tough, moving film.

At the dock we boarded three ships, replicas of those that had originally brought those men here. The largest carried only 54 passengers. They were so small you wonder how they ever got across the ocean. In fact the builders of these replicas actually sailed them from England to Jamestown with a volunteer crew and it took over three months, just as the original ones did. We learned how nautical miles were measured:

A piece of wood is tied to the end of a 42 foot rope that has a knot in it marking each foot. This wooden piece is put into the water as the ship is sailing along and

The line is being pulled through the sailor's hand as he counts the knots while watching a thirty second hourglass timer. The number of knots to pass through is how fast they are moving. The sailor on duty must log the speed and the position on a map all through the night. That's how they chart their course. It was intense work and if they screwed up they got to hang from the yardarm!

We saw a canoe being formed from a huge tree that had been cut down. First they cut a slice off the length of one side of the tree trunk to form a flat bottom. This gives it stability in the water. How they cut it off, I don't know. Then little fires are set all along the length of the top side of the log. The scorched area gets scraped out with a shell. The area is scorched again. and the burnt part scraped out more until they had a serviceable canoe. This had to be an arduous process. The one we saw would seat 12 to 20 people!

And So ended week two for us .

2005 May. DC and Philadelphia.

Friday; travel day. Arrived at Greenbelt National Park near Washington, DC. This is a neat Park. Lots of folks in rigs and tents enjoying all these beautiful trees. An oasis.

Actually it's Maryland, but is only five minutes from the Metro into Washington. We walked with Paddy along a winding pathway through here chatting with neighbors. We're dry camping. National parks have no hookups for electric or water so you live out of your rig. And it's only ten bucks per night. Can't beat that. We have a generator so we can even have A/C if we want and can use the stove or whatever. This isn't really camping. I told Sam I'd go with him only if there was coffee in the mornings. So far so good!

In the morning we took the Metro into Washington and were soon in Ford's Theater. What a cute theater, about the size of our original Oslo Theater in Sarasota. But this is where Abe Lincoln was assassinated. It was weird and

eerie to be there. We were guided across the street to the room where he was carried and laid on someone's bed. The tiny, single bed was much shorter than he was. And this is where he died. A sobering moment.

Next we were in the Hard Rock Café enjoying a nice juicy hamburger. When we came out, just a short time later, our beautiful sunny day had turned cold, dark and blustery!

We went to the Viet Nam Memorial. It was overwhelming . The sheer size and shape of it ; how it begins on the ground and gradually grows higher and higher with names covering every inch of it. As we walked along, searching for names and reading others, the weather Turned darker and colder and the wind blew wild. Somehow it seemed appropriate here at this time and place. It looked like a deluge was coming so we hightailed it out of there and back to the metro. At the campground everything was quiet, beautiful and serene. It was almost as if the weather was part of the Viet Nam Memorial program.

We heard later the freak storm had pitched over forty boats on the Potomac nearby as a regatta was taking place. The rescue teams had quite a work out.

We visited my nephew and his family. My brother's son Tom, recently retired from the service, had arrived home from Iraq just two weeks earlier and now works at the Pentagon. I finally met Beverly and their three boys. it's about time we meet. She's sweet; Tiny and cute as Filipino gals are. They'd met in Alaska when each was stationed there. Tom grilled steaks and we had a lovely, informative visit. I'm so happy we connected with them.

On to the Smithsonian which is actually seventeen huge buildings, each a square block long and deep. Plus it includes a full Zoo. We saw dresses from just about every inaugural ball since Washington. Look how tiny people used to be!

Eventually I wondered aloud, where are the dinosaurs?! Oh, they're not part of America's history. We'd have to go to the Natural History Museum. Well, da.

So eventually we stood under the dinosaur's head and looked up just as the TV ads show you.

We'd barely scratched the surface but were exhausted and head for the rig. .

In the morning we drove to George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. We toured his house on the banks of the Potomac . It was nice, unpretentious and comfortable. As the docent walked us through the slaves quarters we listened to her tales. She had many stories of their affairs and intrigues, giving us a view of their fears and delights. The thing I remember, though, is the outhouse. An impressive, red brick, octagonal building with steps leading into it. Inside, along one wall is a bench with three holes in it. Beneath each hole is a drawer that pulls out from the back of the building. I must admit, I'd never imagined such a facility.

Next we drove to Annapolis where luckily Sam took the attendant's advice and left the car at the Visitors Center. We walked to town, passing by all the backed up traffic in these two lane streets. These streets go in every direction creating weird angles. Tall flatiron or triangular shaped buildings stand on corners. We browsed all around town and at the docks we finally stopped for a lobster lunch by the water. We never made it to the military academy. Tomorrow we'll leave here for Pennsylvania.

After such a lovely little campground on the beltway in Maryland, we ended up at a Walmart near Oxford, Pennsylvania. On the way we got discombobulated but it worked out perfectly. As Sam maneuvered the rig around in a big dirt parking lot to go back the way we'd come, we saw a nice Laundromat and a café right in front of us. Laundry was on our agenda so we got that chore out of the way. Later we met with Maureen, my friend and past sister in law, and rode with her to Lancaster. The countryside was beautiful. We saw several horse and buggy rigs proudly trotting along, and our dinner at an Amish restaurant was fabulous. So nice to spend the afternoon with her.

The next day, with Paddington on guard in the rig, we drove into Philadelphia where there are so many historic things to see: we learned that the Liberty

Bell was used every day for 90 years before the second crack appeared and it had to be retired. We were at the capital building where Congress met regularly during the years Philadelphia was the capital of our nation. Carpenter's Hall was interesting: A nice red brick building just for carpenters to meet in. They had a union for themselves. They cared for their own widows and children. On display in this hall was an instrument invented by Ben Franklin,A glass armonica. A blind woman played beautiful music on it. The sounds came from the rims of partially filled wine glasses as they turned while she placed her wet finger on the rims. assembled in such a way as to be played, sort of like a piano. We visited the tiny home of Betsy Ross who sewed American flags in her home secretly so as not to be labeled a traitor. an industrious woman, she also did upholstering and she made bullets.

All these buildings in Philadelphia are the original, over 200 years old. I mention this because in most places buildings have been rebuilt after fires or whatever. But in Philly they're the original rooms our forefathers, Franklin and Jefferson and others, worked and lived in.

in this bank building was the stuffed Eagle that used to be on top of the Liberty Bell. It, too,

was over 200 years old. We went to see the mint, but arrived just as they were locking the doors. Too bad. I think we saw the best of the area, though. It was late and would takeover an hour to get back to our Paddy wagon so we had to skedaddle! Tomorrow The Big Apple!

We left the Philly Wally World and drove to New Jersey. Our new campground is called Cheese Quake National Park. Don't even ask where that name came from. We had a pleasant rain for a day and a half But we'd expected tons of rain on this trip and had towed the car rather then the bike. Now we know why… Our G A at work. Saturday morning we packed some clothes and paddy's ditty bag into the car and drove through the Lincoln tunnel to Curtiss's apartment. Thankful now we had the car so Paddy could be with us in the city.

Curtiss had arranged with a neighbor across the hall for us to use her apartment at a fabulous price: 50 bucks a day! This was fantastic, much easier than commuting back and forth to the rig which would have taken hours out of each day. And just for the record, here's how it played out:

50dollars for our room, 19dollars for the rig, and 19dollars to park the car in a garage in New York. So we paid 88bucks per day to stay in the Big Apple! Can't beat that.

We met up with Curtiss, settled Paddy in the apartment and walked the two and a half blocks to Central Park. What an amazing place. We wandered through the Tavern on the green and Later actually napped on the soft grass. Here were Acres of beautiful green grass with thousands of sunbathers laying around as thick as peas in a pod! Like a beach with no sand or water. The grassy area was rimmed with a little hill and trees bordering it. In other areas of the park we watched the remote controlled boats racing around on a pond and roller skaters dancing outdoors to music. Before we knew it we'd walked about twenty city blocks. It was so interesting. Pathways and hills, huge boulders and ponds. And people everywhere enjoying the park. Just wonderful. And right here in the middle of Manhattan!

Meanwhile back at the apartment, Curtiss and Haley were preparing dinner for a party. He'd made a chicken pasta dish with a heavenly sauce. My son, the cook! It was delicious. They had friends in their studio apartment and we all chatted till nearly midnight. So nice to meet everyone. In the morning we went to breakfast in Greenwich Village at The Crazy Cowgirl where all the workers get an opportunity to sing or perform for everyone at some point during their shift. A chance to audition in case anyone is interested.

We walked the streets a bit and hopped a city bus where we rode on top of the double decker to the Battery in lower Manhattan and back. It was informative and exciting. That evening we went on foot to Time Square. That too was amazing. Lights, colors, advertisements and glitz blinking and flashing and jumping at you like crazy. Seemed like they were a hundred feet tall. Every inch of your vision was captured in brilliance. It's so busy I'm not sure anyone knows what's being advertised! At midnight this Sunday evening, there were throngs of people gawking at all this right along

with us. The city that never sleeps. Eventually we crossed the street and walked a few blocks into the quiet night of my son's neighborhood.

The next day Sam and I hopped the Metro to the Battery and got tickets for the ferry to the Statue of Liberty. I'd never seen Lady Liberty or Ellis Island. When it's your first time It's awesome. and eerie.

I wondered if my own grandparents had gone through those frightful rooms hoping and praying each member of their family passed all the requirements to be admitted.

When we got back to lower Manhattan we walked past Wall Street and pet the big black bull there on the sidewalk. Then we spent a few minutes at Ground Zero, just pondering.

Then as the sky darkened we moved on up 6th Avenue. We walked fast a bit and hopped a bus heading for Central Park. We arrived at 57th Street with rain coming down in torrents. Luckily we had our 76 cent Walmart ponchos with us and donned them before exiting the bus!

Everyone on the sidewalk was scrambling to purchase umbrellas from the corner vendors and fighting to control them in the gusting wind. Half had already turned inside out. Seeing us waiting in the rain in our cheap, full cover, plastic ponchos, many New Yorkers commented about us having the right idea.

The next morning we met Curtiss and Haley for coffee. Then we packed our ditty bags and Paddington into the car and headed back into the Lincoln tunnel. New York was fun and fine for a few days but it was good to get back to the rig in the Cool, calm, quiet campground.

Oops. So much for calm and quiet…

You haven't lived until you've driven, or even ridden in, a rig like this across the Verrazano Bridge to Staten Island! On the map it seemed the shortest route to Connecticut.

But NEVER AGAIN!!

Because of the rig, we were directed to go on the top level. That was okay. In fact, it was very pretty up there even though the traffic was going ninety miles an hour and Sam was clutching the wheel like it was trying to get away from him. Suddenly all hell broke loose.

We were about fifty stories high with other highways running helter skelter beneath us. Everyone's clipping along at breakneck speed as the road twists this way and that while racing 4 or 5 abreast, dodging and crashing into pot holes. I'm hanging on. Paddy's flipping all over the place. The coffee carafe crashed to the floor! We zoomed along up through Queens and maybe Yonkers and the Bronx… I don't know where we were but finally we stopped in a parking lot and it was peaceful again. Oh, Danbury Connecticut. Whew! I'm surprised Sam didn't have a heart attack after that.

Happily, the next day we were in nice, peaceful Ludlow, Massachusetts, camping at our friends house. Al& Audrey, the perfect friends, have a full RV hook up right here in their driveway!

Too cool. Sam took this opportunity for some R&R and R&R. That's Rest&relaxation and research& repair. We've had electrical problems in the bedroom area; like lights working only when they felt like it. Then the TV in the back got involved and then the water pump quit. That was the last straw. No more Wally Worlds for us if we don't have water. He'd been looking into the problem ever since it began, but now took time to figure it out. He called the Georgia Boy manufacturer and got a schematic of the electrical system. Then he followed the wires, even removing floorboards until he found the problem.

Weeks earlier when we burst that water tank and it was replaced, possibly wires were crimped when workers set the new tank in place. these wires wore out and snapped. Now Sam replaced them and life went on. But The thing is, to have someone look for a problem of this type would simply not happen. No one has the time nor the inclination. But he is deliberate and determined. To own a motor home and keep it running you must be inclined to repair things.

And now we're preparing to visit another big and busy city, Boston.

2005 June. Boston and Maine.

Remember how relaxed and peaceful our trip out west was last year? What a difference. But this is all a must see when traveling in the East where our history is rooted.

We arrived at Crystal Spring Campground in Bolton Mass., a private campground with a spring fed lake for swimming. A pretty area with woods nearby but, like most privately owned parks, the rigs are lined up right next to each other at They charge 30 to 45 per night. There's not much choice, though, and I don't blame the owners for trying to make a living. Besides, we'll only be sleeping here.

Kim arrived at Logan Airport in Boston and found her way to the metro. She rode it out to the station nearest us, Riverside, where we picked her up and had Dairy Queen on the way back to the rig. We just puttered around getting her settled in and fell asleep.

In the morning as we walked Paddy we realized we had cell service and could check our messages. But Paddy's having a rough time walking. Lately I must lift him up and down the rig steps because they're too steep. He seems to have arthritis in his front elbows. My Paddy's getting old.

In the morning we took the metro into Boston. First on our list was food. We'd been warned about how difficult Boston is to find your way around in. One old timer told us the streets were originally cow and goat trails that meander this way and that. So true

! They make no sense with X crossings and Y crossings, and flatiron shaped buildings at the corners. Even maps were hardly helpful. Somehow we arrived at Quincy Market:

a popular shopping district with indoor and outdoor eateries. We took the time to enjoy a sweet, delicious lobster, my second one this trip. We hopped on and off a tour bus several times. At Paul Revere's house we learned he had 16 children by two wives. He was a blacksmith with his own copper foundry and made many of the fittings on the USS Constitution and the copper dome on the Capital Building in Philadelphia. He made a good living.

At the historic North Church we sat in a booth and listened to the history of this remarkable place of worship. Built in the 1700 era. This is the second church we've visited where instead of sitting in pews there are booths with two facing benches inside. They're only about shoulder height so you can see the preacher at his pulpit way up high in front. Usually a family takes a booth together. Some have a warmer for hot coals from home that keeps Them fairly cozy during a service. . It was comforting to sit there and imagine the other folks you knew keeping warm together as the preacher expounds on the Bible or tells of local happenings. Some things can really take you back.

We went to the docks to see the USS Constitution. This ship, still in service at this time, is over 200 years old. We saw where the sailors sleep in hammocks and where they eat their meals, we saw the many, many cannons, and learned of the young boys whose job it was to bring the cannon balls from the lowest level of the ship up to the cannons on the deck. These spry little lads were called 'monkeys' and they tried to keep the big brass holders filled with cannonballs for the sailors to grab and fire as quickly as possible.

Hence the phrase: got more balls than a big brass monkey. I thought it important that we understand this. This ship got its nickname when it was hit repeatedly and one of the crew noticed there was barely a mark on it. He called it "Old Ironsides".

After that we worked our way back to the metro. The temperature had dropped from our usual nineties to about 65. It was sprinkling as we left the

docks so we got coffee at the Dunkin Donuts in the subway and settled down for our forty minute ride to our station. Then it was a forty minute car ride to the rig. It had been a full day and we were bushed.

FYI: there are 14,000 Dunkin Donut shops in Boston and only 2 Krispy Kreme donut shops!

But I still prefer Krispy Kreme!

The next day we drove to Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts. we toured Louisa May Alcottt's home. Our guide talked an hour as we rambled through their house and their history. Her father and Nathaniel Hawthorne were good friends and at one point Hawthorne bought a house next door that Alcott owned. Also nearby was Ralph Waldo Emerson and the famous pond. This whole area is known for its prolific artists and literary geniuses.

In Lexington we stopped at the North Bridge where the 'shot heard round the world' was fired and the Revolutionary War began.

Next, Harvard. Well, that was a bust. First we got entangled in road construction. don't forget, the streets here make no sense. I don't think there's a square block in the city. We never did find Harvard Square. (which I can only assume IS square.) We saw some of the University buildings and a garden dedicated to John F Kennedy. That area was beautiful with the river alongside it, but where IS Harvard? Eventually we found our way out of the maze and back to the rig.

Now: the main reason we came to Boston. My family has a particular, genetic eye dysfunction and Boston's Eye Infirmary may have some idea of what's going on with us. So the next morning Kim and I took the metro into town and spent the day at Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary: each having our eyes examined. Starting out with blood work, we passed each other all day in the halls as we went from one room to another. At the end of the day they took more blood to analyze. We saw Doctorr Elliott Burson who is renowned for his work and study of the retina. His entire career has been about this

part of the eye. But the result was disappointing: they don't know what our problem is. It's nothing that's been suggested over the years.

Sam met us at the riverside Station at 6 pm. It was a long, arduous day. We stopped for dinner at Ruby Tuesday's, got back to the rig and crashed.

Kim was flying home the next morning so we took her to the airport, shopping a bit on the way. Then Sam and I rode the subway one last time back to the car. Gads, folks in these cities spend a lot of time commuting. I've already spent too many hours on this Train.

Our next destination was a campground near Augusta, Maine. Our friends Pam and Russ were volunteering here this summer. The guys went to a fishing shack and bought eight live lobsters for the four of us! We covered a table with newspapers and let loose! with corn on the cob, coleslaw, beer boiled mussels, a couple other dishes I've forgotten,

plus two lobsters each! we pigged out!

It was wonderful. Oh, my aching tummy. That makes four lobsters I've had on this trip. I think I've had only 1 or 2 in all my life before this. After this fest we collapsed, unable to move. Supper that evening was a little ice cream... Burp!

What a beautiful day in Maine. I thought we were vacationing at this point, however, here we go with more history lessons. Pam &Russ took us to the east coast where we visited several lighthouses and had lunch at Two Lights Lobster Shack in Cape Elizabeth.

But I couldn't face another lobster so had crabmeat salad instead.

There's a squat little lighthouse out there that everyone calls Spark Plug because that's just what it looks like. It's adorable. I bought a sweat shirt with a little Spark Plug lighthouse embroidered on it.

Russ took us to a fort that had been used in three different wars; the Civil War, the First and the second world wars. In the waters off this coast there are sunken U2 boats as well as German boats.

We wandered in and out of a huge old burned out house: Originally several stories tall, now it had no roof and only parts of the second floor. It looked as if it had been elegant in its early life.

but during these wars it was used to house soldiers. You could tell the basement had been an officer's club. After milling around here a bit we began our trek back. I hadn't realized how much history there was in our Northeast. We had a wonderful day there on the coast of Maine. I was hoping we'd go to Cabot Cove and visit Jessica Fletcher's house, but no one knows exactly where it is! Heading west we stopped at the sight of the huge LL Bean factory. Who could resist that? After the requisite hour or so, we each came out with prizes. Then we stopped at The Sea Dog Brewery on the river for dinner where food was foodly and Friends were friendly. Tomorrow we'll move on.

2005 Still June. Mount Washington, Lake Placid, and Niagara Falls.

Another gorgeous morning as we head across Maine into New Hampshire. The sun's shining and the temperature is perfect. We rolled along with the windows open hearing the sounds and smelling the countryside. It was glorious. In New Hampshire we came upon Mount Washington and decided to do the auto trail to the top. I was here 40something years ago with Big Curt and definitely wanted Sam to experience this. They warn the feint of heart that at some points the trail is on the very edge of the mountainside and you can look straight down into the valley. Also, the road has about an 8% incline, which is rather steep. As you enter the trail you get a 25 minute tape or cd to listen to while driving. You learn history: how the mountain got its name and facts and experiences of Appalachian hikers, to name a few things . the view is unbelievable, Especially on a clear day. But they do get some wicked wind up there. Like 230 mph! Winds at 100 mph are normal. Today they were 17 mph and that was fine with us. The main building had humongous chains bolted over it to hold it in place during storms. I think the structure would disintegrate before long in those winds.

On the ride down we learned about folks running races up this road, driving all sorts of vehicles, and holding contests of all kinds on it. There's also a memorial to hikers who have died on it.

Mount Washington is part of the Appalachian Trail; the oldest foot trail in our country.

The next afternoon we left our campground in Goram, New Hampshire and drove west into Vermont , staying near Burlington that night. I asked if this was the home of the Burlington Coat or the Furniture factory. But, alas, it's neither. Hmmm.

Soon we were on another ferry boat, crossing Lake Champlain, rig and all. This was only about a twenty minute ride and by now we're old hands at it. We found our way to Meadowbrook Campground in Lake Placid, New York. We settled in and did a little cooking this evening. This part of the trip is supposed to be relaxing so by golly, we're gonna relax.

, Wow! We nearly missed this place. The next day we were riding along in the car investigating the pretty little back roads in the area. Suddenly Sam stopped and backed up. He'd seen a tiny sign near a small store we'd just passed. The sign read;

High Falls Gorge. We went in, paid a little fee, and they ushered us out the back door. We stepped out onto a platform and a maze of wooden stairs. In front of us was the most gorgeous Picture ever!! We were looking straight out into a deep gorge, with waterfalls and luscious trees everywhere. It was cool and shadowy. with the sun filtering through a light fog. Wooden walkways clung to the sides of the gorge as far as we could see. We walked down steps that crossed over several times. You see all different views as the water tumbles down the walls of this canyon, creating interesting potholes and eddies in the stream below. Eventually, way back in there, we came to the main attraction. Right in front of us was a 700 foot waterfall. Fantastic! It was just so beautiful. A

breathtaking world unto itself. And but for that tiny sign out front, we'd have missed it.

Was my G A AT work? You bet!

We drove on through the little town of Lake Placid. I have to wonder how this town handled the winter Olympics some years ago. It seems so tiny and cute and, well, placid!

We drove around the lake WHERE all sorts of things were going on. Sail boats gathered at one end, canoes canoeing along one side, children swimming in a roped off area, and a guy in the middle of the lake doing laps! Evidently in training. I got tired just watching him! We walked around town a bit. One little door claimed to be the Library. We went in. It was adorable. We went down to another level and to another building and down further until we found the computer room and checked our emails. When we came out of there we saw a Geoffrey Beane Store with everything on sale. What fun. That pretty well exhausted us so we went into Jimmy's Bar and had a bowl of soup and a beer as we gazed at the lake from yet another angle. The next day we lollygagged with Paddy all morning, Napped a bit , watched an old movie, and went to town in the afternoon.

That evening we had dinner at the Boathouse Restaurant out in the lake. Very romantic. We toasted each other for our birthdays as we sat on the veranda with drinks, watching swimmers in training and folks kayaking: everyone enjoying the evening and the lake.

Another gorgeous morning. We're walking Paddy at 8 am in shorts and tees. We are blessed.

Upper New York state is so pretty sometimes I wish we had the bike with us.

We could ride around here forever …. We arrived this afternoon at 4 mile Creek State Park not far from the Falls. This park is unusual in that it's a grassy flatland with Willow trees scattered here and there among other bushes and greenery. Very pretty, spacious and comfortable. When we walked Paddy we cut across soft grassy knolls right up to the edge of Lake Ontario. All was calm during our visit.

Around 6 we went to see about the Maid of the Mist boat ride to Horseshoe Falls. At this time of the evening it was Absolutely gorgeous on the water ; Sunny and misty.

But I just can't comprehend it: all that water pouring over these rocks continuously for millions of years. We went up to the observation tower and had an overview of the entire scene. Amazing.

Later we were at the top of the waterfall strolling along a nice walk beside the rushing river. here it seems at least a half mile across and looks like it's moving a hundred miles an hour. It's perfectly flat as it races headlong over the edge. I think if you stuck just a toe into it at this point, you might be pulled right in. It was awesome and threatening at the same time. I was amazed there's no guard rail or even a low wall between us and the swiftly moving water. We wandered along this path for a while and came upon a wedding party having a photo shoot. Probably a daily occurrence here. It was nice to watch the happy event for a few minutes.

Down river from the falls about a mile or so, is another park called Whirlpool State Park. There We walked the path overlooking the river at a point where it had created a huge whirlpool. This was in a wide gorge and as we stood there we watched a gondola full of people riding high above us and the river. Funny, I love the two seat ski lift but am leery of so many people in one boxcar over treacherous terrain or a river, as in this case. We began hiking down a trail toward the edge of the river. Much of it was steep steps cut out of the stone. It seemed like we climbed down forever but never quite got to the bottom when we decided to start back up. I didn't want to have to call a rescue squad to get us out of there! Anyway, it was time to go back and relieve Paddington with a nice walk across the campground and to the lake again. He seems to enjoy that.

The whole next day we just lollygagged in this lovely park on the bank of Lake Ontario.

Next stop: Warren, Ohio!

July, 2005. The Big Pig Roast.

We left the next morning. Destination: my home town in north east Ohio, Warren.

We traveled through a bit of Pennsylvania, Near Erie, and into Warren. We settled in at Willow Lake Campground north of town. This park has been here over fifty years. I remember as a youngster, having class picnics here. They boasted in those days of having the world's largest swimming pool as per the Guinness Record Book. It's about two football fields long and has all sorts of equipment to play on in the water. Many of them for adults. One such piece is a row of rings hanging from a line stretched across the entire pool. The idea is to swing by hand from one ring to the next till you get all the way across the pool. After swimming a bit, Sam and I watched from our blanket with interest as one person after another attempted to do this. One young, very muscular fellow got about two thirds of the way across before falling in. Most gals and guys reached only one or two rings. Sam finally decides to show them how it's done. He's on the platform. The first ring swings toward him. He reaches for it and grabs hold. He swings out and drops into the water like a stone!! He came up burbling something about sunscreen on his hands.

Uh-huh. we laughed all day at that one.

I was excited to show Sam the town of my childhood. We drove into Warren and right up my street, Hunter Street. Of course it's changed a lot but still, it brings back so many memories. We parked in front of the house I grew up in and found Antoinette, my babysitter, at her home directly across the street.

Goodness, she's gotten old! After visiting with her a while she took us over to meet the current owner. He told me how he had to replace the stairs to my beloved attic bedroom. I guess that low wall that ran along the staircase with all my boyfriends names etched into it is gone. And I couldn't believe the concrete and heavy slate front porch Dad built had

been replaced with store bought iron steps and railings. I figured that porch would last way longer than the house itself which was built in 1914.

It was nice relating some of its history to the newest owners. I wished that he had invited us in to see what changes had occurred over the years but that didn't happen. I'd been gone 43 years and my parents had sold it over 20 years ago, so I'm sure many parts had been replaced or rebuilt or just let go. If so, I know why they didn't invite us inside.

My wonderful neighborhood was old and decrepit. The sidewalk from my house to Nancy's house where we learned to skate was uneven and broken. There was a hole in the line of houses like a missing tooth. What had happened to that house? It was good to see our red brick road and some neighbors but still, I left with a hole in my heart. Too bad things have to change.

The Hot Dog Shop is only a few blocks away. We often went there for a dog or two. Amazingly, it's still doing a booming business after over 50 years in our neighborhood. I never realized folks came from all over town for lunch. It's become an historic icon, a famous tradition, and it's almost a requirement to have a hot dog here when visiting.

We found the library downtown but not where I left it back in 62. The big, wonderful old building with the high, arched ceilings and the smell of polished wood and old books and the big lions that used to sit on either side of the massive staircase, guarding the huge front doors are all gone.

The new library, in a different location, is square and modern and probably efficient but leaves one flat. Just another new building.

A mile or so away is my alma mater, Saint Mary's School. I went from kindergarten through high school in this building and just look at how tiny it is! A long, skinny construction with one long hallway and rooms on either side. It had three floors and a gym for the boys at one end. I couldn't

believe how small the kids playground is. And totally concrete. Ahhh, well. Some fond memories came out of there

. It was getting late so we made our way back to Willow Lake for the evening. Campgrounds are usually busy on Friday nights but we had no idea how crazy this one was about to become. July 4th weekend. What were we thinking?

Saturday we wen to Gina's to help get things ready for the festivities. She and Bob had been hosting these parties several years and It's grown into quite an event. Friends and family come and spend days camping in the back yard or taking motel rooms. This was the first time I was in the right place at the right time and able to attend. We were actually of little help. They had everything under control. We spent the afternoon visiting with other early arrivals. My brother Steve and daughter Jenny arrived from Michigan minutes ahead of us. Everyone hugged and kissed and introduced everyone to Sam. There were several new babies in the group also. Gina & Bob had two huge cookers for full size pigs. They had a huge tent in the yard with tables and chairs set up. At the foot of the yard several sleeping tents had been erected. The rest of the yard was for horse shoes and badminton and such. This would be quite a family festival!

I'd made several dozen deviled eggs and Sam packed a couple watermelons into the cooler and we head off to the party. We got to the roast and joined in the happy crowd. It was great. So much good food laid out. What a feast. Eric & Mindy, another nephew and wife, have an adorable four year old son with quite a personality. After napping upstairs, he came wandering out to the picnic area. His Grandma Myrna saw him approaching and commented, "Thomas, were you watching us from the winda upstairs?" He looked at her but didn't answer. He was thinking. She repeated the query. "Did you see us from the winda, Thomas?" With one hand on his hip, he finally replied, Grandma, it's a window."

Another nephew, Shawn, was there with his 4 kids. Two are adults and two are new baby twins!

Gina's son, Jeff, was there. My brother Mick arrived and we caught up with him and Steve.

The party grew as the day went on. The kids were having a blast with the water hose and yard games.

Finally, Bob had one of the cooked pigs stretched out on a table and was vigorously carving it up and pitching discarded fat and whatever onto the ground at his feet. I was sitting nearby with my back to the action, chatting with Mindy while Paddington sat obediently under the table at my feet….

Or so I thought.

, looking over my shoulder, Mindy said slowly and with her nose wrinkled up, “Gail, your dog has something awfully big in his mouth.” Aw, Geez. There was Paddington under the carving table scoffing up that fat as fast as he could. He was grunting and snorting just like a pig. Grease and fat was running off the table onto his head and shoulders. What a mess. I know he was thinking he had to eat every bit of it before his mama saw what he was doing. We tried cleaning him up but he just looked like we’d used gel to give him a spike hairdo. Guess who got a bath that night!!

Monday was actually the 4th of July, our festivities were over and we had no plans. I wanted to see my old downtown again and show Sam the heart of my city. We drove to the center of Warren . There was not one person to be seen. Where was everyone? It was spooky. Most businesses had long since moved out to malls and such.

We parked in the center of town where all the busses used to come from both directions with hundreds of people coming and going all day. But not today. Not anymore. No noisy cars or even a city bus. I knew the busses had long since been discarded but this was depressing.

Sam parked the car on Market Street right where they all used to line up at the big covered terminal. We walked the streets that used to bustle with hoards of kids every day when schools let out. We strolled in the park with the big, stone Court House proudly setting at the top of the knoll. I’d never noticed how beautiful that park and the courthouse are. Riding my bike, or walking very fast, through this park and in front of the court house, was part of my daily rout to school all those years. Now it was a ghost town filled with memories. In my mind I saw city busses arriving and departing on both sides of the street. I could even smell the gasses from them. I could see the cars of the 19 50s & 60s with loud mufflers and flirtatious horns honking, and everyone laughing and shouting at each other to “hurry up!” I showed Sam

where we got French fries and cokes at Kresge's 5 & dime every day. where Mom worked at Grey's Drug Store on the corner there, and Strauss's, the expensive store we could never afford, on the opposite corner. The more familiar Sears was down the block a ways. I told him how half the time I missed my bus and had to walk home anyway. Geez, this was my own Norman Rockwell memory.

Backing up a little, yesterday morning we'd moved the rig out of Willow Lake. This place was quite an experience. Hundreds of tents; I think each with at least four kids, having a blast. A super place for a holiday week end for them. They never slept. Laughing and giggling and racing around the whole time. We really didn't mind as we run a noisy fan all night. But 30dollars a night was pretty high. We learned of a nice Moose Lodge near Gina's house for 5 bucks per night. It was quiet and we had adult neighbors plus we had food and drink right at our door. Five other rigs were already hooked up there and couples came out to greet us. Such a nice, friendly place. After getting settled in and having a bit of lunch with these new friends, we drove around the countryside for a while and I showed Sam more of my childhood.

By the next day Paddy was having a touch of the runs due to his fat fest the other day. Knowing he would probably sleep all day, we left him home with the floors covered with papers while we drove through all the outlying areas of Warren, all the country roads. I never realized so many of these townships are Amish settlements. We passed several horse & buggy rigs gliding along in their own specially marked lanes. These sturdy little horses looked so proud and so pretty as they pulled their carriages at quite a clip down the road. We went to Chardon, Ohio, near Cleveland, to visit Don and Nancy, my sisterin law. We all had lunch at an Amish restaurant, , and it was good to spend time with them. Then we picked up her mother, Evelyn, from her day center. I hadn't seen her in many years. She's adorable, in her eighties, seems about four feet tall. we both had tears in our eyes as we met and hugged. Such a sweet lady. Forty years ago she helped me when I brought my first, and then my second, baby home from the hospital. She was always there to do the hard stuff.

Although I'm long divorced from her step son, I'll always feel she's my beloved mother in law.

We chatted the afternoon away, and left with a huge bag of fresh chocolate chip cookies.

It was dusk as we drove back through the countryside. Funny how you don't appreciate things when you're growing up. There're so many terrific places in this land of ours. Even here in Ohio!

The next morning we stopped by Gina's. All the remnants of the big party were gone. We took her & Bob to lunch at a cute little waterside restaurant called 'Up the Creek'. We'll be leaving tomorrow so this was good bye for awhile. That evening found us at Mary's house for one, last, impromptu get together. It's so much fun to see these old school chums. They bring news of other friends that I've lost touch with. I've known Mary and Patty since kindergarten, while the rest came into my life around seventh grade, so we all go way back. Everyone looked happy and fine. Sam was a big hit. They loved him. I was told he was a keeper, and the single ladies wanted to know if he had a brother! We were having a good time and before we knew it, it was late again and we had to say goodbye For the last time. In the morning we'd head back to Florida.

2005 August. Sarasota. We had a brief interlude between our trip east and volunteering in the mountains. It went by quickly as we worked in the yard and cleaned the house a bit. AS usual, much of the month was taken up with routine visits to doctors, dentists, and tests for this n that.

We rode the motorcycles with Liz & Ed over the Skyway to John's Pass to browse around and have lunch. My tenants each had all their duckies in a row and soon We left Sarasota for Georgia again. I'm especially excited about going this time because Nancy & Bob will be with us And We think we can camp beside each other. We settled in quickly. Everyone was Happy.

Then, during our second night a tornado came ripping through. It was very damaging in our small town of Helen, taking the second story off the local Hotel and tearing right up the hillside through our park. Lots of tree damage, but no one was hurt and no vehicles were in the path. We all slept like babies as it passed through just an eighth of a mile away!

2005 September. Unicoi State Park, Georgia.

On the 1st we moved our rig into the site next to Nan & Bob which had just been vacated. And finally we settled down to the tasks at hand: working and having fun.

One of the most fun and funniest things we've ever done is tubing down the Chattahoochee River! It was just Nancy, Sam and me since Bob was having a terrible back problem at the time. The launching place is out of town on a bend in the river. There's a concrete wall behind a gas station where we can get into the current and be on our way. . To stay together we used straps provided with the tubes. They loosely tied us to each other. I was surprised at how huge these tubes were. And they had bottoms in them. Great!

So, first off, we put the tubes into the water while hanging on to each one, and Sam helped me get into one. The current immediately pulled me out from the launching step, dragging the other two tubes with me. Nan and Sam grabbed onto them while each tried to get into one. Nan stepped into the water and suddenly it was up to her neck! Now she can't get out and can't get in the tube! Sam's struggling mightily to hang on to all the tubes and stay on the launch pad until everyone gets settled . Finally, with the help of some spectators, they get into their tubes and we're off! PHEW.

A big part of our problem here was that we couldn't stop laughing during this whole debacle.

We'd bumped along for quite a while enjoying the freezing water on our backsides. We switch leaders as the current dictates. In a shallow spot we get caught on stones and finagle our release by raising our rear ends and frantically rocking our tubes. After all that current at the loading site, now we sit on stones like fish flopping on shore. Finally we're all floating again. The water is deeper now and The current has picked up. We float smoothly for a while and then around a bend, under the bridge and right into view of all the cafes and restaurants in town along both sides of the river.

Folks are eating and watching the tubers on the water. WE ARE THE ENTERTAINMENT!

We're still joined to each other with straps. now, by some quirk of Nature, I'm leading the pack. My tube, a huge pink doughnut, gently bumps up against a large tall rock jutting out of the water. No problem, right? I should just bump the rock and bounce off. Think again. Because we're tethered, Nan and Sam plow into me, sending my tube right up that rock. My feet go straight up in the air and I tumble out backwards! Now I'm under water with only my butt clearing the water line and they all float away! What a show. It seemed to take forever for me to right myself as I coasted down river in front of everyone. Finally I got my head above my butt and I see Nan and Sam floating way on down the river with my tube! Eventually I catch up with them hanging on to a tree waiting for me. .

Now to get back into this contraption! Miraculously one foot found a rock beneath me and, by jumping up from it I was able to jettison myself back into the tube. Although it could have been more serious, at this point we're laughing hysterically. We coast nice and peacefully for a long while. Eventually we decide to release ourselves from each other. The river looks quite calm from here on out. We relaxed a bit, caught our breath and gently floated on. the river flatten out into a slow, wide, shallow bend. Now it's only a few inches deep again. This is no problem except our butts keep hanging us up dragging on the bottom. Thank heaven there's a canvas cloth between us and the rocks. We're trying to reach the stones with our feet and push off to deeper water. Suddenly Nan's tube shoots straight up in the air and she's flopping around on the riverbed. I start laughing, still struggling to get that thing moving and suddenly mine shoots out from under me also! Here we are, two old ladies flopping around in this shallow water like a couple of beached whales. We laughed so hard we peed our pants. But who cared?

Our tubes moved on down the river. What a riot. That evening our throats were so sore from laughing and screaming we couldn't talk.

Cornhole is another game we enjoy. Sam built this game of pitching corn filled bags into a hole in a board. Ken & Karen were here and we played this several times: Girls against boys...

We girls were too good. We won every time.

One of the best fall festivals in Georgia is Gold Rush Days at Dahlonega with terrific arts and crafts to peruse.

It seems like we didn't ride bikes as much this year but Spent more time with more friends.

Meanwhile, Florida had an unusual number of hurricanes this season, a concern for the house in Sarasota. I never worried about anything happening there until recently. I've had a gut feeling it's time to get out. When we get home in November I'll check it out. Here at Unicoi we have some hurricane Katrina refugees. Their house in New Orleans was under water. Each year gets worse. This year had 26 named storms and five of them were category 5! That's a lot of wind and rain. I feel my guardian angel is telling me something. . And you know, I always listen to her.

Wow, suddenly we have a game changer! Besides performing our regular duties as volunteers , the four of us began looking at property to buy up here. How nice it would be to live in our rigs all summer in a community of our own. There are several such parks to investigate. . After searching we found two sites at Paradise Valley Campground that we all agree are perfect. About 85 miles northeast of Atlanta, near Helen and Cleveland, PVC is a gated community with a rec center, a pool, and lots of activities during the summer. We chose two lots just around the corner from each other. Everyone leaves by November and returns in May. We're all excited to come here next spring and relax and play together and work on our own properties in our own community. When we finished our duties at Unicoi this fall we left our RV on our new property. That's a big plus. When we go back we'll tow the Harley trailer and bike with the car and have all the toys in one place.

On the way back to Sarasota, we spent several days in Gainesville with Kim and family again. With the niggling thought of selling the beloved house in Sarasota, we looked around Gainesville for an area that might suit us. Turkey Creek Forest struck our fancy. We actually looked at several homes there but none were quite right. However, we knew we liked this community and would eventually find the right house.

2005 November. We got back in town and delved right into the real estate foray. Soon we were on line with an agent and a write up of my house, including 10 photos. I was floored at the price they wanted for it: over eight hundred thousand dollars! We didn't even have two hundred thou in it! But now that we're listed, we're living in a glass house. An agent might come by any time to show it.

Thanksgiving day '05. Our 2nd anniversary. Sadly, Rick and Tom are preparing to leave. This was our last supper together; Me and my guys. Everyone enjoyed the day as best they could.

And happy 2nd Anniversary, Sam & Gail!

New Years Eve we stayed home watching videos while 2005 wandered away without a whimper.

2

2006 January. New Rig, Curtiss's Connecticut Wedding, beginning our third year together!

We visited Pat & Art in their new Florida home in Ellenton Florida. . They chose a modular home in a new development. They seem to like it and their kids live nearby. but I love our idea of Turkey Creek Forrest in Gainesville much better. They suggested this area in the first place and we wish they had bought here. Darn.

One day Kathi came by and brought me a big black coffee mug with Harley Mama on it. It's on my desk with pens and stuff in it. Looks good. Note: 20 years later it's still here.

Speaking of moving, nothing has happened on the house. Nary a nibble. I had them drop the price quite a bit on the recommendation of some professionals. We'll have open house again soon. I'm not thinking about it. Too much else going on.

As it happened, Our big excitement was that Sam traded his Georgia Boy in on a newer RV! on our way to the annual RV show in Tampa we noticed a brand new La Mesa RV dealership had popped up along the highway. They were new to the area and didn't stay there very long, just long enough for us to drop by and make a deal. We fell in love with a gorgeous three year old Fleetwood Pace Arrow. Green on white with green carpet inside. Stone grey Corian countertops and THREE slides!, two large stainless steel sinks

with a purifying water dispenser, separate shower, side by side Stainless fridge, washer/dryer, automatic satellite finder, surround sound system, etc., etc., etc.

Quite an upgrade from the old Georgia Boy. Sam struck a really good deal with an interest rate under 3% on the balance. We sat at the dining table in this rig with the salesman as he yakked on and on. I kept banging Sam on his leg beneath the table to encourage him to get it, get it, get it! When I learned later that that dealership was no longer there, I felt that my Guardian Angel must have set that whole scene up for us. Can you believe it?

To complete the deal we had to bring the old rig down from Georgia and trade her in. So we drove up in the car and came back in the old rig towing the Harley/trailer. Then, with the old and the new rig parked side by side on the sales lot, we transferred everything movable into the new one and spent the night there on the lot. By the next day the new one was parked in my driveway. Sam worked every system on board to make sure things run properly while we had the warranty, even ran a load in the washing machine ! Everything Worked fine. I puttered around lining all the cabinets and such. We made a reservation at Hillsborough River for the next week to test everything out . (and maybe show it off to our friends a wee bit.)

While camping at Hillsboro River, L&E came up to see it and to ride a bit. They seemed fine but she reported that they broke up on their way home that same day! Oh brother.

As we drove the new rig to Georgia where our poor little Oldsmobile was freezing and patiently waiting to be rescued, we made several stops. In Ocala we looked up a school chum of mine , Mary, where she was vacationing. She and a friend rented an adorable little house. Just what I hope to find in Gainesville some day. Sam grilled chicken there with his favorite Tony seasoning. Mary fell in love with it. Maybe she fell in love with Sam also ! It was fun.

We camped at Kim's for a day or so. Kim and I shopped for dresses for Curtiss's upcoming wedding . Finally we arrived in PVC at our campsite and there was our poor little car, sitting there cold, lonely and shivering. "Why did you leave me up here all by myself?"

We winterized the new rig for its Georgia stay and packed the car with stuff we'd need in Florida. Then, barely twenty miles down the road the car

began making a horrendous banging noise. Uh oh… Not good. Maybe it was upset with us for leaving it. Or maybe for nicknaming him ‘the jerk’. But regardless, we hobbled to town to a GM dealer where they assured us we were NOT going to Florida in that car! They took us and our stuff back to the rig. Immediately I started a pot of chicken soup because that makes everything better, and we settled in for the duration. It was Thursday and we probably needed a new engine or a new car so we figured to be there at least until next week. In the morning Sam went on the bike to get his phone jack from the car. He returned quickly to tell me it would be ready in two hours. Oh Geez. I packed the soup and freezer stuff and he re winterized the rig. We left at two that afternoon. Only one day later than planned. phew!

Sarasota. Things seemed quiet now that the activity and thrill of buying a new rig is done. We stayed busy in the yard and exercising and Sam began a daily walking routine. We both look slimmer and feel good. We shopped for Sam one day and got him all set for the wedding.

2006 April. Kim, Alex and young Sam came to Sarasota for a few days to celebrate the boys April birthdays. After shopping at Walmart, Target, Macy's, etc. we did the party scene in the yard with cake and ice cream. These few days were dedicated to them.

We had a problem in our yard. A huge cactus was Growing up the phone pole to the maze of electrical wires at the top. We got an estimate of 500 bucks to have it cut down! I didn't want Sam to do it himself as it seems very dangerous. This particular plant has 4 inch daggers in each frond and is way up there in the wires. I figured eventually Florida Power and Light would need to cut some of it out so let's wait and see. As it happened, a tree service company left a note on our door the very next day. Ultimately, FPL removed the entire thing at their expense. That was great!

We went to the Moose Hall one evening with Liz & ED and we all had a nice time. A few days later Ed invited us to dinner on his boat. But when we got there; no Liz. He’d invited a slew of other people we didn’t know. Dinner was a hamburger and potato chips. Hoo boy.

Then One day Liz brought home a tiny Yorkie. Life as she knew it came to a screeching halt. Suddenly everything revolved around Rosie. Maybe this will make it easier for her to stay away from Ed. We'll see.

In late April Sam & I left town for the mountains. We packed his little trailer full of stuff, strapped the tandem bike on top, stuffed the little car, and took off. We drove up to our new property in Georgia. It was cold there and I wondered why we'd left such perfect weather in Florida. But this too shall pass and soon it will be too hot!

2006 May. PVC- Paradise Valley Campground.

Our site is a big gravel drive thru with a large half moon area in front containing bushes and two big shade trees. We have a concrete pad for the rig and front porch. It's flat and bare; quite simple. Besides the two trees at the front of the lot, there are several more along the back edge of it so the shade comes and goes with the angle of the sun. Perfect. We'll have no grass to mow and very little upkeep to the bushes. Sam will spray the gravel with vinegar occasionally and we'll gather the leaves in the fall. KISS.

Upon settling in, we began cleaning out the bushes and I planted impatience in the blank areas in between and in front of them. We placed a birdbath on the mound and a couple feeders nearby. He made a little sign proclaiming "Sam and Gail" and our address. It's so cute!

We found a wonderful Amish made picnic table at the local hardware/furniture store. It came with two long benches with backs on them, plus two short backless benches for each end of the table. It's rugged yet adorable. We are now known as "the folks with the picnic table."

Our site, 125 Camp Town Trail, is on the main road into the campground so Everyone passes by each time they come or go. Even going only to the mail box or the pool or clubhouse, most residents pass our place. Consequently, we've met nearly everyone who lives here. They all wave as they pass by. Now Sam wants to put an automatic hand that pops up out of the bushes to wave at them!

We've been riding the tandem bike and everyone gets a chuckle out of it. And most days we take walks. It takes a long time to walk, though, since everyone stops you to chit chat a spell.

Lots of chatter going on about the upcoming board elections. We've had an earful of past goings on and the need for new board members. I think folks have done a great job of running this place so far. We went to a couple meetings and voted in some new members. That was followed by a big cook out and get together. We've had a pot luck dinner and a breakfast already. Arts & crafts, card games and dice games are getting started. The pool is beautiful but still too cold.

Nancy & Bob got here just before the voting. They were so impressed with us knowing so many people But after a couple weeks, they also know most of them. Everyone's so friendly.

Sam ordered a 5by 6 shed and spent a few days building its base and erecting it. He built shelves and filled it up! Many of the guys have come by to see and he is now the official shed info person. He's already helped several of them get theirs up. We brought home a trailer full of gravel and leveled out the back part of our site. Another day we shared a load of mulch with Nancy. Both our sites look cute now. She wants to put in a stone patio on the back side of their rig where It is shadier and cool.

Already we've had several motorcycle rides. I love Dahlonega . I bought a throw, a pillow, and a sham there at the Appellation Trader. So it's been a lot of fun getting settled in here. Our place looks adorable and everyone loves to drive their golf carts right up to the picnic table and set a spell. It's neat. Oh yes, we also have the corn hole board out and folks stop by to toss a few. Now Sam's been put in charge of the outdoor games committee. The fourth of July should be a good time to get that started. Till then, See Ya!

June, 2006. We drove to Birmingham, Alabama where we connected with Sam's daughter at a local mall. We picked up his grandson, Dylan, and brought him back with us. And the fun began! The next two weeks were

geared toward him. He was great. Of course, as all nine year olds, he already knows everything... However, I think we showed him a few new tricks and a few new foods to enjoy. Sam was very involved and he and Dylan did everything together. One favorite was riding the tandem bike in the mornings. Puttputt golf was a hit and within a few days Dylan was proficient on the stilts Papa had built. Swimming was a daily occurrence with Lots of kids at the pool most of the time. One older boy was the shark who constantly threatened anyone jumping in. Lots of screaming and hollering. Great fun.

One day a bunch of us started the trek up to Brasstown Bald. On our path was a 4 foot rattle snake snoozing peacefully in the sun. He was not about to give up his spot. Sam was able to convince him, with my walking stick, to move on into the bushes. That was exciting for everyone.

We went bowling one afternoon with Nancy, her granddaughter and other PVC friends, followed by a pizza lunch. Another day our neighbors took us to lunch in appreciation for Sam helping him get his new shed erected. It was at this luncheon that Papa Sam realized Dylan had a habit of wiping his hands on the front of his shirt throughout the meal. Suddenly we were on a mission to correct that real quick. By the end of his visit Dylan was very aware of the use of napkins. Hopefully this awareness stayed with him.

One day we brought home a load of mulch and we all worked getting it from the trailer to the garden. Then our property looked even better! We have impatience plants and a birdbath among the bushes at the center of the site. Also several pots overflow with colorful flowers on the patio. Near our shed are two small arborvitae plants and three pots containing jasmine. Pretty pretty.

After two weeks with Dylan, we traveled by rig to Veterans State Parkin Georgia where Kim and her boys met, and spent the night with us. Although It was terribly hot the next day, we all went to Plains where President Jimmy Carter lived. We visited his boyhood home and other historic sites there. It was here I learned how peanuts grow! Who knew? We also spent about an hour in the museum at Veterans. The guys loved all that war stuff. Kim and

Alex left later that day for home, leaving young Sam with us. The next day, Dylan's parents arrived, spent the night, and took Dylan home with them. Now we're back to having just one grandson in tow. Young Sam, and dare I say old Sam and I headed back to PVC. We had traded in a 9 year old little boy for an 11 year old who thought he was about 24! There's quite a difference between the two. Young Sam's big in karate, feeling mature and helpful.

He quickly learned to prepare his own bed in the rig, which was the dining table. He'd lower the table and make his bed and put it up again in the mornings. His first two days with us were rainy and grey so we checked out several classic movies from the library; things he'd never heard of and didn't know he would enjoy. Treasure Island, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn to name a few. We encouraged him to investigate some things other than his favorite animated action shows and I think he was pleasantly surprised.

One day we were at the beautiful Tallulah Gorge, the deepest gorge east of the Mississippi. We walked quite a ways, stopping at each overlook to view the waterfalls and finally arrived at the stairs going down to the bottom. We crossed the suspension bridge and continued on down. Halfway down my knees were quivering. I figured going back up would be interesting., if even possible!

Young Sam and I lost count of the steps after 500! Three days later my calves were still tender .

Carole and Mel had us over for a cook out at their site by the creek. After a swim in the pool we went there for drinks and munchies. With only adults in the group, I was afraid Young Sam would be bored. Not to worry. He chatted everyone up like a trooper, telling stories and enlightening us with his karate expertise. He dubbed Carol "Hurricane Carol", the reason for which was their secret. At the ripe old age of 11, he is a very personable young man.

He met two other visiting grandsons to pal around with. Justin and Taylor were on constant chick patrol. Thursday at our regular bowling time, these guys were there so young Sam bowled with them. He was elated when he beat them in the last game. They were, after all, 13 and 14! After bowling we did lunch where he gobbled up a Rueben sandwich. I was surprised he

would eat something with sauerkraut on it. He exclaimed, “Of course I'd eat it, I'm half German you know.”

While we had lunch, the power in Helen went out. None of the stores could operate. So we went home for our swimsuits and went tubing again. The water wasn't very high that day and the river was low and slow. We kept getting stuck. Young Sam would jump out of his tube and, macho man that he was, pulled us along till we got to deeper water. It was fun and he had a blast, all the while on chick patrol. I know Big Sam & I were exhausted by the end of the day.

During their visits each of the boys wanted to see their own favorite TV shows so we’d let them have the front of the rig, setting the TV to go off at a certain time. We’d retire in the back and everyone was asleep by 10o’clock anyway.

In the end we drove back to Perry, Georgia, where we met Kim and Alex again and had lunch. Then everyone headed home. Big Sam and I rode along, quiet and childless. YAHOO! .

2006 brought a hot, hot summer! most days in the high 90's unless tempered with rain. We enjoy the laidback feeling of being here on our own little site in our own campground. But we watch as folks work day after day on new cabins and wood sheds and landscaping. They work so hard I think they’ve missed the summer. We’re thankful that we both have the same attitude about most things. We thought about building a big cabin and screen room like many folks have. After seeing what’s involved, we decided to get a shed for tools and equipment and enjoy living in the rig. Isn’t that what it’s for? This works perfectly for us. Everyone likes how simple and spacious our site is. And we’re happy with it.

By now we’d met most of the folks here in PVC and they all seem friendly and anxious to get to know one another. However, one gal burst that bubble for us when she held a large gathering at her place. A pot luck. It was really fun; everyone introduced themselves with a short bio and some hilarious stuff. But then she delivered a political statement that put a bit of a damper on the whole thing; at least for Sam & me. I thought this was just a fun

gathering, a chance to meet and greet everyone. Now we realize there's a division in the park. Why does everyone have an agenda?

We had a good routine going of swimming at the pool every evening. Several other couples showed up also. Then we had a few days of rain and the water turned too cold to enjoy. We lost our momentum. Oh well. We still have a monthly breakfast and other get togethers.

2006 July. fairs & fun.

We, along with the NanBobs went to the Smokey Mountains near Cherokee and camped for a few days. We couldn't believe how much cooler it was there. It was so heavily shrouded in trees that we had no idea how hot it was beyond this cover. We browsed in Cherokee a couple days and I brought back a precious little hand woven wisteria basket .

Sam turned 62 this month. He's thrilled to be eligible for Social Security. I gave him the most precious gift a man can receive... a new clicker!! This one opens the gate to the campground. Prior to this, he used a card and it was quite difficult, especially when arriving in the RV. Now he's an even happier camper.

We went to the North Georgia Mountain Fair. Oh, I loved it. Being used to Florida fairgrounds with their miles of flat land and hot sun, this was such a treat. We walked on a path in the woods , up and down hills. Wooden cabins with open fronts all along the way displayed the wares of the artisans. At the top of a rise was a large hall which seats 3000 people, where free concerts were held daily and all evening. We saw John Anderson, who did "Swinging'" back in the 80's. Brenda Lee and many locals often appear. They have famous people scheduled for every day of the fair. There were many exhibits to see: tons of old, old farm equipment that I didn't even recognize, plus wringer washers, cash registers, a man demonstrating a home combine from his family's farm, a complete pioneer cabin, a sawmill and a blacksmith at work. We visited the arts and crafts; jellies and pies, gorgeous quilts and needle work that had already been judged. It was a beautiful experience. I loved the fairgrounds itself. And we went there on the motorcycle which is always a treat. What a fun day.

2006 August. I'm trying to lose a pound or two before Curtiss' wedding next month.

I think I've put on 20 pounds since I met Sam 5 years ago! I work out with Denise Austin every morning. Drink a mixture good for lowering cholesterol each day in place of a meal, and truly eat small portions of whatever. Maybe one day it'll suddenly just disappear. Wouldn't that be great!

One evening a group of us went to see "Arsenic and Old Lace" at the Black Bear Dinner Theater in Helen. The play was great and the food terrific. A good time was had by all.

Nan & Bob have a new little puppy with a stubby little tail, Penny. She's cute, of course. A mixed breed but mostly dachshund. They love her to death. Every other sentence is about Peeney. That's how she pronounces it… Peeney. They've lost a good deal of their freedom since bringing her home, but as I said, they love her to death.

Liz seems to be getting along without Ed these past several weeks. She never calls me so I check in on her occasionally. Not much happening on that front. She's also all wrapped up in her puppy, Rosie.

2006 September. We were at the Atlanta Aquarium one day. What a fabulous place. I was particularly infatuated with the Beluga whales. We watched them by looking up through a huge plexiglass wall. There were three of them in a row, poking their noses up out of the water at the folks up above them while we were entranced watching them from below. Their long bodies moved so gracefully like silk blowing slowly in a breeze. It was like a choreographed dance right in front of us. They glided around in the water like they were doing a ballet. I'd never seen this type of whale before and it was mesmerizing to watch.

Oktoberfest starts in mid September at the Fest Hall in Helen. One evening we did the polka and the chicken dance almost continuously. Great fun and good exercise.

Charley & Bev recently bought the site backing up to Nan and Bob's property. It included a 5th wheel already set up. Nan's happy to have them nearby as they seem like fun folks to have around. We had a variety show one afternoon at the clubhouse. It was crazy. Nan modeled in the fashion show wearing a paper dress. I helped her make it and get it on and hoped it would stay together for the duration. It was cute.

Tall, skinny Charley was the last model; showing off a woman's nightgown with a sleep cap, fuzzy slippers and a teddy bear. All went well until he lined up with the rest of the models in front of a wall of windows with the sun setting right behind them… Sam called out,

"Hey, Charlie, you don't know nothin about ladies nightgowns. We can see right through that one!" All eyes turned to Charlie standing there with his skinny bowled legs and boxer underwear showing right through. hilarious!

One day Nan&Bob went with us to the Hay Loft for their great fish sandwiches. Our time with them has been greatly curtailed since Little Penny came into their midst. Al & Audrey came to PVC for a week and rented a site nearby. We took them to Oktoberfest one evening and to Anna Ruby Falls one day. Then they went off sightseeing on their own. They were on their way to Florida. The day they left Paradise Valley, we also left for Connecticut for my son's wedding. We got to our destination, Lake Waramaug State Park in New Preston, Ct. on the Tuesday before the wedding. This was a pretty park and the weather was perfect. Wednesday we drove around, just finding our way, to the wedding site and up to Torrington where most of our family was staying. Thursday we would PICK Laura up at the airport.

Well, who knew the day from hell was about to begin!

we didn't even get out of the State Park when the car's dash light came on. oh gads, The alternator! But, I wailed, we have to get Laura at Hartford airport at 5 o'clock!

Never fear, says Sam. After 45 minutes on the phone, he located an alternator in a nearby town. We carefully drove there, using as little battery power as possible. No brakes, even. He installed it there in the parking lot and we took off. My hero.

Going through Torrington I checked the cell phone we'd borrowed and heard that there were two messages. Just seconds through the first one, the phone died. Oh great, now Laura can't even let us know if there's a problem. Neither Sam nor I gave it a second thought. We went on to the airport in Hartford, 90 minutes away, only to fine it was the wrong one. We were directed to another airport. We tore across town and waited at the reception area just as that plane began unloading. Finally the pilot and crew pass by... no Laura.

It dawned on Sam we could get messages from this dead phone by calling it from another phone. Huh. I didn't know that. Laura's message that had been cut off was that she'll arrive 4 hours later at 9:30 pm.

So we found a place to eat and have a drink to calm us down. At 9:30 we are again at the reception area watching everyone disembark. Eventually the pilot and crew walked by us... no Laura. We look at each other. Go to the public phone again and this time listen to all the messages. Now we realize Laura's stuck in Cincinnati. Will arrive at 9:45 in the morning.

We got back to the rig at midnight and started out again at 6am. Yahoo! We got her!!

After dress rehearsal Friday, we all went to the Upper Crust Restaurant where we had a room to ourselves. The food, pizza, lasagna, anti-pesto etc., was excellent.

While eating they ran pix from the bride and the groom's childhoods. That was fun.

Curt the elder was there and finally I met his current partner, Ellina. She seemed shocked to meet me. She was a much older lady who was hard of hearing. She said, "You are Gail… THEE Gail?!"

I smiled and said “yes, I am Curt’s kids mama.” It does seem that he keeps looking for a mother in his relationships, but then,… I’m not a psychiatrist.

The Wedding. It would take place outdoors at sundown near the lake. A beautiful setting.

The crowd was gathering. The first folks We ran into were Dan and Jen from Sarasota. Then Bunny & Jerry found us. The wedding took place in the back yard of this fabulous house. The yard sloped gently down to the lake. on different levels were huge tents set up for dancing and for dining. In a little peak that jutted out into the water was a small cabana, or huppa. The vows were exchanged here. It was all very pretty. The temperature couldn’t have been better. .

Curtiss ushered me across the lawn to be seated in the front row with Sam who was already there. Next to him was Big Curt and Ellina.

Haley was gorgeous in her size 2 gown! Her cousin performed the nuptials, about half Jewish as she is of that faith, and they said their own vows to each other. A lovely ceremony. They looked so happy and committed to each other. I actually wiped away a tear or two.

Later in the food tent we ate lobster, corn, potato and slaw. There were 14 tables of eight or more seats each. A good size group. Sam & I started the dancing in the music tent, just sort of goofing around while everyone finished eating. Young Sam came by and requested the chicken dance… and the party was on!! We retreated back to the food tent in time to hear several toasts to the happy couple. They cut the cake and everyone visited a while longer. Folks made their way back to the dance tent where my Son and I did the mother groom dance.

Everyone had enjoyed the music and the rest of the evening was lovely.

The next morning we went back to the scene again and enjoyed a lovely brunch while visiting with more folks . But Waramaug State Park would close and lock its gates at noon that day for the season. If we didn’t get the rig out of there in time, we’d be locked in until next spring! So, when breakfast was over, we said our good byes to everyone and Laura, Sam & I left. We drove the rig to our new campground, Hemlock Hills Resort, for the

remainder of our stay. We had a couple more days to check out the countryside before Laura needed to be at the airport again. After delivering her there, without a hitch I might add, we returned to the rig and our trip home. Keeping in mind this was the first time out with this rig, here's what happened next...

With everything picked up, put away and secured, Sam and I walked all around, checking things one last time, making sure all the storage doors were latched properly and nothing was left behind. Sam slipped into the drivers seat and fired her up. I was inside, watching out the windows. The drive out of here was full of trees and pot holes. The rig began rocking wildly back and forth as we moved forward. Suddenly there was a loud, weird bam! We looked up out the window. Oh Good Grief! The Awning was still out! ! This rig has an automatic awning. Unlike our old one that slants down quite a bit, this one goes straight out with no visible support bars. And being blue, it disappeared right into the trees and sky above. Neither of us noticed it was still out until it hit a tree! But, here we were, trying to take off like a bird with one wing. Thank goodness it did no damage and we were able to laugh at the vision of us flying around in circles.

And so ended our Connecticut visit.

October, 2006. Good to be back in Paradise Valley. .

Sam got involved with constructing the new parking lot for all the cargo trailers down by the roll off. He phoned Ed in Sarasota to let him know we were back as we knew he wanted to bring his bike up and ride a few days that month. So guess what...

he arrived with Liz! Oh good grief. We figured all this time they were separated.

After they got here, we learned Ed's been dating another woman for the past few months. Liz was going nuts with loneliness and her "love for Ed" . She began chasing him.

So for the last few weeks, while he's still dating the new gal, they've been seeing each other. They don't go out in public and none of their friends know

this is going on. Ed tells Liz he's not breaking up with his new lady friend because he knows she'll soon send him on his way.

So this trip comes up and they come here together with Liz on some sort of probation! Well, now Ed's mind is on the other woman and of course she occasionally phones his cell which irritates Liz beyond reason. We can see Ed is not his usual loving self toward her and she feels a wall around him.

We did have a couple nice rides together. One evening they took us to Edelweiss Restaurant for a scrumptious German meal. It was excellent and we had a nice time. I don't think Liz liked her steak too much but she's hard to please anyway. The rest of us loved our German meals.

They were here just a few days when suddenly it was all over. Early one evening Liz noticed him outside, talking on his phone. She stormed out, practically yelling right in to the phone;

"ED, are you going to get a shower?" He nearly hit her. She deliberately tried to end his relationship with his new friend. She slept inside our rig that night and Ed used the tent alone. We figured they'd leave the next morning but Ed said she wasn't going to cut his trip short. So

We spent a weird Saturday with Sam out riding and entertaining Ed, and Liz and me inside commiserating. That evening we told them they'd have to leave in the morning as this was too uncomfortable. The guys loaded his bike into the trailer so they could get an early start. We volunteered to take down the tent and bring it when we go home. They left by 8:30am. What a relief! It was too much. We won't do that again

Reader, if you think I've been stretching it about these two over the years, just know this:

I haven't!

November 2006. Sarasota.

Sam took a job at the local Ace Hardware store To keep busy. My contract with the real estate people expired. Not one nibble all year. he brought us a

FOR SALE sign for the front yard and I'll be home all the time so we'll see how that goes. I Certainly know more about this house than these agents; all they know is $$$!

Linda retired recently. Hopefully we can have more time together now . Sam and Ron get along well and we're all trying to sell our houses and move to north Florida. We have a lot in common again.

Thanksgiving was different, but nice. We didn't have the usual gathering at our house with 'friends at loose ends' this year. And it was our third anniversary already. We were at Kim's in Alachua Tuesday before the holiday and celebrated Wednesday. We put up their tree and did some decorating while preparing the turkey feast. The family was off Wednesday so the gathering was that day. Loyd's mom shared it with us. On Thanksgiving Day Sam and I drove to Ocala where some of his family was having a gathering. This was my first meeting of these members of Sam's family and It was really pleasant. His little Aunt Janie, 83, is adorable. We visited with her as she prepared huge pots of dressing and gravy to take to cousin Jimmy's house. It was quite a large gathering. I met more cousins and their spouses as we sat in the dining room together while others gathered in other rooms. They're such sweet people. No wonder he's such a love.

Saturday evening Gunther & Vivian stopped by to take us to a dinner introducing us to the new insurance program that's growing in popularity today: United Health Care.

2006 December. Sam's been working at Ace Hardware so I've had lots of time on my own in the house. He bought me an early Christmas gift: a wireless laptop computer. He put my JAWS program on it and it works pretty well. Actually, it works perfectly. I just have to get used to it. I still prefer my desktop. The laptop will be great in the rig and I'll get used to it then.

We put a For Sale sign in the yard and I'll hold open house on Sundays while Sam's at work. Nothing happened thru November. On December 6, while at the dentist having my teeth cleaned, Mary Kay reminded me of good old Saint Anthony and his ability to find anything. So, for the rest of the day I prayed: " Tony, Tony, Are you around? I've lost something that must be found,

Please, find me a buyer for my house".

Would you believe… the next day I had a phone call about the house! Two days later a young mom came to see it. Her husband had been called in to work so she came with her three small children. She made me an offer which I accepted the next day. And things have been hopping ever since. We've had contracts and lawyers and boxes, boxes and more boxes. It's so exciting

Christmas was lost in the shuffle. Kim and the boys came down one weekend and we spent a day relaxing and playing at Livingston's Amusement Center. Then out to dinner and a movie. We all went bowling the next morning before they left for home. A good break for everyone. Christmas day. We'd planned to go to Linda's for dinner But Ron had a fever and cold. We stayed home and ate the deviled eggs and green bean casserole I'd made

. Then our power went out so We went to the movies and to the Dutch Valley for dinner. This is one of the few places we knew of open on Christmas Day. Our friend Joe was there and he shared his table with us. It was very pleasant. We enjoyed our meals. I had traditional turkey dinner while Sam and Joe had hamburgers! Obviously They don't know how to do Christmas!

The New Year came in like a lamb as far as we know. We slept thru it.

See ya next year!

January, 2007. New Car, New City, New House.

Another new year, and what an auspicious beginning! What could ever top this month?!

To begin with, I was about to get a signed contract as the new year rolled in. But days passed between communications. Waiting was excruciating. Sam took our minds off the whole thing for a while when he began looking for a new car, ultimately Trading the little Olds, the jerk, for a 2 year old vehicle: a 2005 Jeep Cherokee Limited Edition. This vehicle has a HEMI5.7 V8 engine, and who knows what else. All the toots and whistles are here. . You can talk on the phone by pressing the mirror and reciting the name or number you want. No hands! It has individual air conditioning control buttons and seat warmers. Those are my favorite whistles. Sam loves the transmission options and some of the other toots. Even the remote control for garage doors and gates is built right into the overhead. Lights brighten and dim automatically, as do the windshield wipers. What a smart car! That was fun. But one of the best reasons for switching autos is that this one can not only be towed by the RV but it can also tow the Harley. Not, however, simultaneously. The Highway Patrol frowns on that!

Our attention was diverted for a week or so but soon turned back to the house deal… And the whirlwind began ! In mid December we had an offer and it was all over by mid January. We'd puttered through the holidays hardly getting anything done. Then suddenly we were signing contracts and having yard sales. that day several neighbors were having sales and our street was bogged down with happy shoppers. A fabulous sale for all.

Meanwhile, up in Gainesville, the perfect house had Just been put on the market: Two bedroom/two bath, a double garage housing the laundry area and lots of room for everything. There's a covered breezeway between the garage and the house. We love it. The funny thing is, we looked in this neighborhood several times earlier with no luck. Now we're ready and here it is! You know who is watching over us.

The yard sale was Saturday, the Salvation Army came Monday for the remnants, a POD unit was delivered Tuesday, and we began loading large furniture into it. I'd already initiated the purchase of the Gainesville house, contingent on the Morris Street sale. Depending on the whim of strangers is scary. This was an Extremely stressful, yet exciting time.

We finished emptying the Sarasota house and I signed papers Friday, January 19, 2007. We left town with our little trailer full of stuff. We took a hotel room in Gainesville but we were so anxious and sick by then we stayed in the hotel bed for two days

Thank God, they signed as promised, What a relief. A couple hours later I signed on my new house at 8620 NW13 St. Lot 108, Gainesville Fla. Actually it was very smooth, but nerve wracking. We got our keys and the garage door remotes and moved in with the little U Haul full of stuff. Soon the POD unit was delivered and everything else was moved in. We'd brought just enough stuff. Everything fit perfectly. We're IN!

Turkey Creek Forest, TCF, Is an Arbor city so we have lots of trees. What a great place! The rec center is always busy with something.

Folks ride bikes and walk dogs. We brought my tandem bike along and joined in. This community is similar to a campground with so many trees. and even though the houses are close, it's definitely a forest. We have shuffle board, horseshoes, tennis courts and a gorgeous pool. The clubhouse is lovely with windows all around, carpet and wood flooring and nice furniture, including a baby grand piano! Activities are abundant. It's a 55 + community so there are few kids around. And it's great knowing my Kim lives nearby. We'll love it here. Thank you Art & Pat for telling us about this place.

2007 February. I mentioned earlier that my BF of the past 30 years or so, Linda, is also moving from Sarasota to northern Florida. It was quite a surprise to each of us a few weeks ago when we realized we had the same plans at the same time. She & Ron are settling in Lake City, 25 miles north of us. We'd been out of touch for many years and it was exciting to learn they were buying property and moving up here, just as we were. So our relationship picked up right where we'd left off so many years ago.

Both Ron and Sam ride motorcycles so you know we'll get together often.

I need a desk. we Visited every store in town with no luck. Then started on used furniture places. We found the perfect one! It's large, in perfect condition, has a file drawer, two junk drawers and lots of storage space. It has a slide out keyboard shelf and a tall skinny compartment for large envelopes and tablets. Everything one needs for an office. And only 50 bucks!! What luck. We couldn't believe it. I love it!

Our next project was the living room entertainment center. We wanted a corner unit. Sam found it online from Home Decorators. He put it together and it's perfect. He's a wonder. With the TV on top, it contains all the components to our music system. And it's so small, sitting there in the corner. We gained several feet of living space with this unique piece of furniture.

We've had several square dance lessons, been shopping and dining and sitting with the boys a bit. Sam's completing paperwork. Every day he's online or I'm on the phone, changing addresses and establishing auto deposit and auto payments. Etc. No easy feat Dealing with Social Security, Medicare, Insurance companies, banks and utilities, etc. A nightmare! We're finally at the point of sitting back and watching it all happen. .

2007 March. Gorgeous days. Mostly sunny and bright, not too hot or cold.

On the Harley we investigated some of the nearby towns. Just south of Gainesville is Micanopy, sometimes pronounced My can o pee. This tiny two block town is full of antique shops and restaurants. They have the most beautiful, huge old trees with Spanish moss flowing in the breeze beneath the great shady limbs. Older than Gainesville, this is the midpoint between Saint Augustine and Cedar Key.

We visited the home of Marjorie Kennon Rawlings who wrote several books including The Yearling, Jacob's Ladder and Cross Creek. Each taking place in this area. We wandered through her farmhouse where she did most of her writing.

We rode with Linda & Ron to the little fishing town of Cedar Key where we had lunch and browsed a bit. This Key is a long way from anything, but was a pretty ride on Florida's back roads. Afterward we stopped at the local Dairy Queen for a treat. A beautiful day shared with good friends.

Later, Gator. I can say that now that we live in Gator country, Right?

April Showers? Where are they? There's been so little rain this year we're on constant fire patrol. Several large ones rage as I write this, though not in this area. Sam discovered a sprinkler system in our yard a few weeks ago and after repairing several of the heads, set it to wet the grass regularly.

We had my dining room chairs repaired and reupholstered this month. Three of the cane backs were replaced and all the cushions replaced and covered with a Chinese red fabric.

I'm thrilled with the much firmer seats. and I can't believe 30 years have passed since I bought that Drexel dining room furniture from Maas Brothers! This'll last me the rest of my life! And I still love it!

We've been dealing with the purchase of a condo in Portland, Oregan this month. . I helped Laura with the down payment but beyond that, it will be hers. I can't wait to see it. It sounds great: bamboo floors, granite countertops, and nice upgrades throughout. When we get there Sam said he'll install ceiling fans. All she has to do is make the payments!

I needed to see a dentist here in Gainesville before traveling this summer. Coast Dental was recommended so I had three teeth in a row crowned. Three weeks later: My dentist made a note in my file that he wasn't totally satisfied with one of them. A couple spots were extra sensitive but they assured me they'll heal just fine.

2007 May. In Georgia

. It's fun seeing our Paradise Valley neighbors as they go by, often driving in to chat a bit. Sam's friends, Ann & Glen, called and we got together at the campfire with snacks and drinks. A good visit lasting well into the night.

Today its cool and rainy. We'll be at the pot luck this evening where we'll see more folks.

When we left Florida we'd been experiencing quite a bit of smoke in the air coming from Georgia. Now we're in Georgia and the fires have moved into Florida. Kim says the street lights in Gainesville remain on all day because of the smoke. Visibility is near zero in some areas and some folks have been evacuated along parts of I75, I10 and I95. depending on the winds. Wow. That's scary.

Note: My teeth that were crowned in April still hurt. This may be normal but it's not fun.

By mid May we were packed and ready to hit the road. We said so long to our friends and pointed west. Made one final check of the underbelly and the trailer for stowaways. Everyone wanted to come with us. we drove 270 miles to our first stop at the Tuscaloosa Walmart. That evening we ate all the leftovers for dinner and restocked the rig with food from the store. As it grew dark, we listened to some old time radio programs Sam had previously downloaded on the computer. Just trying to stay awake till a reasonable time to retire. Slept well. This was a very quiet spot in the parking lot. Or maybe we were just exhausted.

Back on the road by 9am. Destination Brandon Mississippi to visit with Sam's family.

It's easy to stop and visit Debbie's family for a few days whenever we go west. We stay at a nice campground called Timberlake. We had them out for a cookout one evening. And the kids stayed overnight without their parents another night. Little Elizabeth, now 2, has her Poppa wound around her little finger while Dylan, 10, likes to expound on his technical knowledge.

By Monday my jaw was really hurting. Up to this point I'd been popping Motrin, aspirin etc. but now I fear somethings going on, like an infection?

We Called the dentist and had prescriptions prepared at our next full service campground.

At Wally World we Got penicillin and codeine. Then I realized I'd need a laxative so got a bottle of Senokot. So I'm taking an infection preventative -anti biotic, pain pills- codeine, and poop pills- no explanation.

We arrived in Branson Missouri in time to take in AN evening show SO We selected the Ball Knoppers. It was hilarious. Lots of comics and country music. This group was the first show in Branson fifty years ago. The next morning we saw Yakov Smirnoff. What a riot. He's hilarious as he tells of being a Russian immigrant many years ago. His show's patriotic and his love of America is apparent.

Then we saw Pierce Arrow. These guys sing like the Statler Brothers but with a gal and a band and comedians . A good time filled with song and fun and gospel music. All the shows open and close with the National Anthem and salutes to veterans. The epitome of an all American City!

We drove through Missouri and spent the next few days in Kansas. This area seemed Low and Flat with Heavy skies and spritzes of rain. Recently they'd had an unusual number of tornados so We watched for funnels as our route took us to Greenburg. Suddenly we were stopped in our tracks by law enforcement. Greenberg Kansas had just been demolished! Wiped out by a tornado! Crews were cleaning up the area and hauling away debris. Everyone's homes, businesses, the whole town, gone.

We were detoured to another highway. Wow, it's hard to fathom. Very, very sad.

We drove on to Dodge City. While visiting the Long Branch Saloon where Miss Kitty used to work, I had a sasbrilla as the cowboys called it, and Sam enjoyed a beer. (FYI the actual word for this beverage is Sarsaparilla). Who knew?

We wandered around the old town for a while. Tomorrow would kick off their 'Territory Days' celebration with shootouts, cancan dancers and such. But we'll have already moved on.

. Saturday we arrived at Mountain Dale Campground between Colorado Springs and Canyon City where we just relaxed all evening. My tooth still hurt: but this was nothing compared to what those folks in Greenburg are feeling. We seemed to have a pall over us, we couldn't get them out of our minds. Sunday was better. We went to Canyon City and rode the train through the Royal Gorge. This was beautiful. And Uplifting. The Arkansas River flows through the gorge with rock walls over a thousand feet high on each side. The train travels right along the river with rafters doing the white water thing. We drove under the highest suspension bridge over water in the world. We rode outside in the open air car. I used the binoculars and it was amazing how much better I could see everything.

As we were leaving the train some folks suggested we take a ride on Skyline Drive. They Were excited to share how it would give us a wonderful view of the entire city.

Skyline Drive. Oh my gosh. Here we are on the Harley on a narrow, one lane dirt road going up the side of a mountain. When we reached the top we stopped in a little flat area and took pictures of each other and of some other tourists. Then we mounted up and continued down the road. However, it didn't go down. It went straight out. We found ourselves on top of the world! The road was straight out in front of us and that's all the land there was. Just one car lane with barely blades of grass at each edge and down the center between the tire tracks. Sam had to keep the two wheels of the motorcycle in one track created by car tires. When I looked to either side I saw the city about a mile below me. I don't know how Sam held his cool but he continued to drive straight on across that skinny little strip. Skyline Drive indeed!. It was very scary. I was so glad to start going downhill again and have a rock wall at least on one side of us. I wonder how many folks get up there and are too petrified to continue. You can't turn around or pass anyone. After that harrowing experience we rewarded ourselves with a D Q.

The next day we rode into Colorado Springs just as their 'Territory Days' were being celebrated with food, music, crafts and entertainment. A beautiful Chamber of Commerce Day: blue skies and bright sun, I bought a pretty western top with a bit of glitter on it and Sam got a tee shirt and a hat.

We rode on to see the fabulous Garden of the Gods. Here were humongous, beautiful rocks jutting up from the ground. Named the Garden of the Gods in the 18th century by the first folks to come upon it, it's a 45 minute stroll and quite a creation. Formed eons ago by two shelves of land crashing into each other. One phenomenal sight is called Balancing Rock where an unbelievably huge boulder sits on a tiny rock pedestal.

Suddenly the sky darkened. we rushed for the bike. half way to the rig everything turned black. We stopped and donned our rain gear. Then it was freezing and hailing. We got to the rig and warmed up. Half an hour later it was sunny and bright and turned into a lovely evening. Ya just never know!

The next day, with my jaw still aching, we drove directly to a Dentist office in Colorado Springs. Where I was assured there was no infection to worry about. so after lunch we continued on to Denver.

It was raining a bit, but we surely didn't expect the fierce hail storm that was about to take over. As we crossed the Rockies, it turned very dark . We continued up over icy roads through sleet, hail and clouds. An electronic

sign overhead warned us of icy patches. We crossed Eisenhower Gap and Saw an upside down car. Help was already on the scene.

Then while trudging up the next mountainside our engine gave an ominous chug a lug , sputter, and shut off!! Yikes!

The check engine light came on. Now what? Are we going to roll back down this mountain?! My stomach flip flopped and I nearly messed my pants!

Sam was tense because of the weather but he says the light coming on didn't bother him. Ya, sure. Miraculously The engine caught again and we continued upward. We went through Loveland Pass, Independence and Vail Pass. Up & down, up & down in the dark, with wind and hail bombarding us. We drove on until we were at the bottom of the hills and found a place to get off the road and into a parking lot. It was 33 degrees. We were both so nervous and exhausted we crashed at once and slept ten hours. In the morning we saw that we were at a shopping center in Avon Colorado. Happy to be alive.

Here's a helpful hint for RV drivers: Never, ever, use a gas of lower octane than what's recommended in your engine. Sam believes he put in a little cheaper gas when filling up and it caused the engine to chug along in the cold weather. Of course, we had no idea the weather would turn so cold like that!

The next morning we were glad to move on. I'm not sure why people want to live in those freezing cold hills. I'll admit the mountains were beautiful today with the sun shining on them as we left the area but the little towns around here were mostly employed in the natural gas business. We saw drilling wells scattered along the way. , they seemed like sad, poor towns. Their other main income is tourism.

Crossing into Utah was like turning a light on. Suddenly it's bright, warm, sunny and flat. Now we see Interesting stone shapes that seem unreal. What happened to those treacherous mountains?

We took scenic route 128 to Moab. Forty miles on a two lane road with practically no traffic. This picturesque road seemed just a foot or so higher than the Colorado River. Along the other side of the river was miles and miles of canyon wall. At several places along our side the land juts out into the water creating perfect resort areas. Fun places for groups to stay and enjoy boating and water sports.

Tonight we're in Moab Rim: a cute little town a few miles from Arches National Park and Canyonlands Park. Once on the grounds, there's a 48 mile road across the sands that take you from one formation to another. In most instances you park your vehicle and hike to the actual site. We saw some of them from the road and saved ourselves for the mile and a half hike to Delicate Arch. It was rated a medium strenuous trail so it should be no problem. Right?...

With a couple bottles of water, camera and binoculars, we took off on foot to see our first arch. For 10 minutes or so we were on a nice sandy path. Then we started up an incline. This was a huge expanse of mostly smooth stone with a step here and there mixed in. Nary a touch of greenery

To keep us going in the right direction, little markers were stuck in the ground. The sun was hot. We trudged up for what seemed like a couple hours, resting for a time under the only little bush on the planet. Red faced and panting, Our water nearly gone, we continued upward. some folks on their way down assured us we were about half way there as they kindly gave us some of their water. Later we found ourselves walking single file along a little ledge just wide enough for one person. We had a forty foot drop off on our left and I kept my right hand moving along the stone wall of a mountain on our right. We followed this shelf along the side of this huge boulder until we turned onto an area where people were milling around on a wide stone patio with a low stone wall around it. Some folks sat resting and guzzling their water. Oh, where's the arch? we asked. They pointed to it. Sam took one look at it and whipped out his map with pictures of each formation. This is Delicate Arch?! It looks like a big fat doughnut standing up on its edge! Truly it did!

Down in a valley before us was a huge ball with a hole through the center. It was a wonder to see, but we both were thinking of that beautiful long, thin arch you see in National Geographic. This doughnut will not be delicate even six billion years from now. Come to find out, the one we wanted to see is called Landscape Arch. Aw Geez. Well, we're not going there today.

Our hike back took about an hour, slightly easier than going up had been. However, it seemed more treacherous as stepping downhill over stone is like walking with my eyes completely closed. Not even a shadow to tell me where to step or how deep it might be. One twisted ankle and its all over. Sam was fabulous helping me cross this terrain. We figured out a dance position that worked for us...

walking directly behind him, I held on to his belt in the back with my right hand and we held onto each others left hands. I'd put my foot right in his footprint. Needless to say, that's my last hiking trail in this lifetime!

Another park, a cool park, in this region is called Canyon Lands; which is actually three separate parks. two require all terrain vehicles so we rode to the last one, "Island in the Sky".

This was an entirely different world A few miles from the Arches. We drove to the top of a mesa that covered miles and miles of fertile, green pasture land. Not sand. This is about 2000 FEET higher than Moab, consequently much cooler. Yet IT'S only 35 miles away! Cowboys drove cattle here because once here they were captive. A fence at the entrance of the plateau sealed them in. And that's the only way to get here since deep canyons surround it.

We rode around up here, stopping several times to view the canyons below. Just Fantastic!

What a wonderful world this is!

Still tired from yesterday, we spent time at the rig cooking and doing laundry. A good day.

We've been traveling two weeks now ; from Georgia to Utah. you just can't beat life in an RV!

2007 June. We left Moab and drove 300 miles to the Salt Lake City area. Much of the way was desert. Then we were surrounded with beautiful mountain walls practically right next to us. We'd be up at 8000feet and then back to 4000. The road meandered along so that at one point a river

and a train track were on one side of us and then they were on the other side; back and forth it went as we meandered along. It was fun to watch the scenery. These canyon walls were set in sand and looked like they were covered in snow. Just like the ones up in the Rockies which actually are covered in snow!

We're staying tonight in a nice campground called Willow Bay. It has a sandy beach by the lake which is a part of the Great Salt Lake. This whole park smells of cottonwood, a heavy, sweet fragrance permeates the air. Sam grilled chicken and we had boiled potatoes in butter and garlic. Yum.

Next, Boise, Idaho. A quick Wally World stopover. Today's drive was about 270 boring miles of prairie. This is a tiny Walmart with a small parking lot but It looked like folks were parked there permanently! Several old rigs looked like they'd been there for a year or more. Maybe the folks worked nearby. A couple cars even seemed to have folks living in them. One car had a pair of shoes neatly placed at its door. By the end of the night the lot was crowded as bona fide travelers arrived to spend the night. I have a feeling this is not what Walmart had in mind when they allowed overnight parking.

On our way to Immigrant Springs we stopped in Baker, Oregon. And visited an interpretive center devoted to the Oregon Trail travelers. This center was way up on a mountain where the wagon trains went. It seems impossible that those people ever survived what they went through. The hardships they endured were depicted at this center. We purchased a CD of campfire music and a baseball cap with a fuzzy buffalo on the top.

It'll be fun to wear as we sit around our campfire back in PVC.

We reached Immigrant Springs that afternoon. Another gorgeous State Park. Sam volunteered here six years ago and really enjoyed it. Yesterday Boise was well over 90 degrees and it's barely 60 here today. I lollygagged in bed this morning until I realized Sam was outside scrubbing the rig in the rain. Well, that's one way to do it! We hung around here all day till the rain went away. Then had a campfire. A good day of rest.

When we left Immigrant Springs we stopped at the Pendleton Woolen Factory. I was excited to learn Pendleton Oregon was the home of those popular long sleeve plaid wool shirts of the seventies some of my friends

had . my mom made one for me for Christmas. It was sharp! A beautiful brown, beige, yellow &white plaid wool; Probably every bit as good because she was an excellent seamstress, but in my 13 year old mind, it's not a Pendleton.

Known since 1800 for its beautiful blankets and woolens, Pendleton has a history of dealing with Indian tribes exchanging blankets and robes for goods and money. The Native Americans use these blankets from the crib to the grave, even being wrapped in them for burial. Pendleton has an interesting underground where the Chinese lived in the early settlement days. I understand today there's still activity down there. There are tours of the underground and of one of the nicer early brothels that show how some of the town's residence lived back then. We didn't investigate this sad part of our history at this time but I hope to do this tour someday.

Note: in 2013 We did this excellent tour. It was well worth the time. Watch for my Article about Pendleton and Stella Darby in my 2013 journal.

We drove about 150 miles along the Columbia River. It's usually such a beautiful drive but this day was cloudy and the wind howled through the gorge. Sam had quite a battle driving the rig, especially since much of the road was right at the edge of the river. Just then Laura called us to tell us they'd reported a windy day in the gorge. No, Da. Was my reply.

! We arrived at Rolling Hills Campground safely and after getting settled we went to Laura's new condo. It's adorable, she has plenty of room, it's nicely decorated, and With windows on three sides it's light and bright. The floors are bamboo, walls a pretty yellow, the kitchen is all new, in black, chrome and yellow. Her bedroom has a walk in closet and a veranda with black wrought iron railings. She's on the second floor and feels very secure. She even has a gas fireplace in a living room corner. I'm pleased with it and happy for her. We'll have a house warming party next week and I'll get to meet some of her friends.

The next day was quiet. Sam and I hung around the rig, he went for groceries and I made chili. Laura and the pups came over later and we ate and played with Chloe and Cleo. They're so dang cute.

I saw a dentist here and made plans to have this offensive tooth re crowned soon. We met Laura's friends, Deanna and her daughter Ingrid at dinner one evening at an interesting old house in town. Sam happened to have some screws in his pocket and fixed the rocking table we were trying to eat on at this restaurant. Isn't he handy! I stayed that night at Laura's and slept with both puppies on my bed. They wuvv me.

Next day Sam arrived bright and early with sausage and tools. . He jumped right in, fixing two of her stools and putting up a ceiling fan. We had a good breakfast ala Laura, and then more work. She and I ran errands while Sam did the bedroom fan and light. This one has beautiful leaflike blades and looks perfect in her room. It even has remote control dimming. Are we spoiled or what? We'd planned to go out that evening but everyone was too pooped to pop.

One Sunday morning she came to the rig and we all took off for the mall. We found a couple things we thought we needed and returned to the rig. Later Sam grilled filets and we had baked potatoes and a wonderful salad with pears in it. Everything was delicious. Good wine, too. Next day Laura was at work so we made our way over to the apartment to do a few more things. We brought the makings for Clam chowder. Sam put in two more of the below cabinet lights in the corners of the kitchen. What a difference! We entertained the dogs and made the chowder. We all ate when she got home and then we drove back to the rig . It has been so cold and rainy since we've been here that we haven't wanted to look for anything else to do. We've been using the rain suits more than ever, that's for sure.

One cool cloudy day we donned our leathers for a ride up a mountain. we came to the Pittock Mansion. I love going through these old homes. This one was built by Henry Pittock around 1907 when he and his wife, Georgiana, were nearly 70 years old. It overlooks Portland and has four 4000 square foot floors; that's 16,000 square feet! The bathrooms, showers, and the refrigerated pantry were remarkable for a turn of the century home.

We continued up the mountain to a little joint that's Been doing hamburgers since 1935. And they certainly know how to do them! They were excellent.

Back at the condo we ate more of her trail mix while she was at work. This is the best darn stuff! Sam hooked up her stereo speakers and woofer and when she got home we went out to a Chinese restaurant/night club called the Ambassador. Some of her friends were there and it became a fun party. We all went to Costco the next morning to get the fixins for tomorrow's house warming bash. I brought back three big bags of that trail mix for us! Sam lined Laura's walkway up to her door with balloons. He was a great host with all the ladies arriving but was thankful when a few guys showed up. He hates being the only rooster in the henhouse! We had Shrimp and sauce, hot shrimp rolls, spring rolls, tater tots, and plenty of sangria. It was cool with the windows open a bit and cozy with the gas fireplace turned on. Chloe and Cleo were excited but behaved nicely. They're so cute and lovable. The apartment looked great and everyone totally enjoyed the party. And I met many of the people I've been hearing about for the past few years. It was good. As things wound down, a few remaining guests watched an old Sonny and Cher video with us before calling it a night.

Laura and I took Sam to breakfast the next morning and then off to browse Macy's a bit. I fell in love with a pair of black jeans that have rhinestones down the side of one leg. They're stretchy and feel wonderful. They're by NYDJ: Not Your Daughter's Jeans! Very cute and made for mature ladies, like me!

Back at the rig, Laura surprised Sam with anew rice cooker. She prepared an Italian sausage dinner in it, in lieu of hot dog dinner. Delicious.

One beautiful day Sam and I took off early in the morning on the bike. On our way to Mount Hood and the gorge, we rode up a pretty scenic route and stopped for biscuits & gravy at a little market along the way. This road had several overlooks where we viewed the Columbia River and the Vista House. We visited The Bonneville Fish Hatchery, where they grow trout and sturgeon. Some of those fish were 11 feet long! At Mount Hood we had lunch at Horse Feathers where we could have watched the wind surfers but, alas, there was not a breath of air today. No surfing. The other day when we drove the rig through this gorge we thought we'd get blown off the road! Go figure.

It was a lovely day though, and Laura came by in the evening with roast beef sandwiches.

Then she and I hit Walmart for dirt, pots and plants to beautify her little deck.

My final visit to the dentist about that sorry crown was so much fun I made one more appointment with him. After that one we Stopped at a Harley shop where I got Sam a shirt for his birthday. We picked up Laura and went to a great barbecue place for lunch.

Home Depot had the perfect shelving stuff for Laura's 5 by 8 storage area in her building. Currently everything is piled on the floor. We got busy and rectified that situation. Now everything is neatly stacked on shelves or hanging on a portable rolling rack. Very neat.

The next day while returning unused shelving we found a doggy gate to keep the pets in the bedroom area where they wouldn't hear so many noises and bark so much when she's away. One time I heard them as we got down to the car; one was barking incessantly while the other howled like a banshee. I couldn't believe all that noise was coming from those two tiny little pups! Now she can leave them in the bedroom closet where they won't get so excited. They are cute but I can't believe the racket they make! Tonight will be the test.

The next day was quiet and somber. Sam's getting things ready to travel tomorrow. Laura and the pups came over for our last day together. The sun came out, we walked the dogs, it rained, We watched an excellent movie: the Long Green Mile. We made linguine with clam sauce and had a good day together. It was hard to say good bye as Laura left for the last time.

It was a good visit and of course we'll talk first thing in the morning.

Sunday was quiet. Getting things ready to travel on to Washington State.

Monday. Making our way to our friend's home in Wenatchee Washington. We drove through the Yakima Indian Reservation. That part of our country was amazingly ugly: dry and brown, rock and dirt. Nothing green. Riding along I thought about what a rotten deal the native Americans got from us. Who could live here? It was horrible. Gradually we entered a prettier area; in fact, now this road became a National scenic route. Everything here was lovely. The river, the trees and the winding road were soothing. We were out of the reservation and as we got closer to Wenatchee, I realized we'd come into a valley surrounded by mountains. We found my friend Rhonda and her hubby John and began reminiscing about our days at Maas Brothers nearly 40 years ago. We had a great reunion over a lovely lasagna dinner. That evening Sam and I retired to the rig parked out front in the street. This is the great thing about traveling in an RV.

We can look up old friends, spend time with them, and not totally destroy their normal routine.

The next day, my birthday, Rhonda drove us around the area. We checked out several campgrounds and found one we like. We'll move the rig later today. We drove to Leavenworth, an adorable Bavarian town where we wandered in and out of shops, laughing at the hysterical sayings on tee shirts and the funny hats. Picked up a few gifts and mementos. This is similar to Helen in Georgia. German music and a Fest hall. Rhonda took us to a park in the woods and we walked a path along the river, across to Blackbird Island, and back. There are so many gorgeous sights around here. Leavenworth, Cashmier, and Wenatchee are all in the valley protected on all sides by the mountains. The weather is moderate: practically no rain. In fact, after the spring melt off, during which everything is bright with color and vivid shades of green, things get dry and brown. But still pretty. Just the constant backdrop of the mountains gives everything such depth. The houses are little and old and precious. We didn't see any subdivisions or apartments or condos. No Hi rises. Just too cute. It feels very friendly here; I love it.

Later Rhonda and John came to the rig bearing a spur of the moment birthday gift. It was a copy of Simon Burch, a result of our conversation about favorite movies. This was her favorite. and neither Sam nor I had ever seen it. She wrapped it in four boxes so I'd have plenty of unwrapping to do.

She giggled all the way through the process. This is something I'll always remember about Rhonda; her happiness and adorable little giggle.

That evening we had Sam's famous chicken, fries and salad. Rhonda and John loved his version of Italian dressing also. We sat around the fire by the river until it was late and time for everyone to crash. We said our goodbyes as they both work tomorrow and we'll be leaving the area. I don't really know how Rhonda and I've stayed in touch all these years. We worked together more than thirty years ago. Then she married John and moved across the country. I think we've seen each other only about three times during these years and then only for about an hour each time. Funny, how things work out.

We slept like a couple rocks here in a cozy little campground, Wenatchee River County Park. The next day we rode the bike all around. The river here flows over a dam and widens into white rapids. Soon we returned to the rig and prepared to move on.

In the morning we drove from the Wenatchee Valley mountains to Anacortes, Washington, about as far northwest as you can go in the Continental USA. Anacortes is a nice little town with many good restaurants and café's. It's the port to the San Juan Islands and Sidney, Canada. Our campground here is a lush forest right on the water called Washington Park. Cool and green with walking trails all around. Here and there on the water side of the park are benches to sit and gaze at the ocean. Whale pods come by on their journey around the islands. The road's a dirt path, barely a lane wide, so Your rig brushes the plants on either side as it goes through the woods. We settled in and met some neighbors. Satellite signals were scarce so we'll just have to talk to each other for a few days! Not a bad thing. This evening we began listening to a new john Sanford book.

In the morning we investigated the town of Anacortes and made a big purchase; a checkered plastic tablecloth for the picnic table. Here in the woods the tables are often damp and usually pretty dirty. Lucky us, this one came with bench covers also. We had lunch at the Cheesecake Café and browsed the shops for a bit. At the rig Sam started a fire in the pit and we sat outside in the woods listening to our book until it became dark and the rain came. We moved the party indoors for the evening. It's really cold

here so I was glad to get cozy indoors. We say we're camping, but you can hardly call it that when you have furnaces and air conditioning keeping you comfy. Spoiled rotten are we! We see families in tents in freezing weather and feel bad for them, but they seem to be having a ball. I guess it's an age thing.

we rode the bike onto the ferry to Friday Harbor, a trip of about an hour. This is on the main island of the San Juan Islands here in Puget Sound. There are about 180 islands, some as small as a large rock. This one is about 18 miles across and has an interesting history...

Around 1850 there was an American Army encampment on the south end of this island and a British encampment at the north end. They went along for years, each believing the land was theirs. Then one day an American soldier shot a pig belonging to the British. Peace was shattered! Troops were called in for both sides, cannons arrived and everyone geared up for battle. After 12 YEARS of negotiating, it was decided the islands were part of the state of Washington and therefore American. The British packed up and left.

We attended a program at the barracks. An old gent sang Irish ditties and gave a narration of the part the Irish played in the Army of the 19th century. They sang little songs they made up about their troubles and there lost loves. They accounted for about sixty percent of the American Army in those days, being recruited right off the boat in New York for a bob and a shot of rum. Since they were already starving of the famine in Ireland and the trip across the water, a shot of rum couldn't be refused. An interesting and fun program.

It had been a great day, sunny and cool and by the end, we were exhausted again.

One day we reverted back to the mundane. We needed to make a Macy's payment but the online pay program hadn't worked for two weeks. So we went to the mall. While there we took in a movie. On the way back we were at Deception Pass; a beautiful waterway, like a lake, with a long narrow bridge across it. I guess the deception was that a British gent named Vancouver thought this water was a passage to the west but it led only to an

island. We stopped for some soup n salad at the Deception Pass Bar and Grill. It was great.

When we left the area we had no real destination in mind. We drove up and over the Cascade Mountains on route 20. The air was clear and cold with snow still on the mountaintops. But things warmed up quickly as we came down the other side. We stopped in Winthrop, Washington: a little old western town with saloons, hitchin' posts and wooden walkways. The gas station even looks like an old livery stable. Population: 350. Perigon Lake State Park was nearby so we took a site for the night. It's warm and sunny on this side of the Cascades. There's an ice cream store right across the street. Goody. Behind the store is the lake. We sat at the top of a rise near the sandy edge of the lake, under a huge willow tree and watched the kids swim. Beyond the restricted area motor boats were racing back and forth pulling tubes and rubber rafts full of kids. We sat there eating huge elderberry/vanilla ice cream cones for a while listening to the shouts and laughter. It was wonderful . Later we rode the Harley into Winthrop and hitched the bike to a post. Got the computer out of the saddlebag and went into the local breakfast place. Oh Good. They have WI FI. Afterward we browsed in town and found a tiny crystal lamp with a heavy base that takes a nightlight bulb. Perfect for the rig's kitchen table in the evenings. Instead of running the rig's expensive lights, this little lamp will give the rig a soft homey feel. we ran the RV washer/dryer nearly continuously and caught up on the laundry. What could be more comforting than a cozy lamp and the washer running?

The 4th of July! We left our campground near the cowboy city this morning heading east across the northern part of Washington State on highway 20. Up 4600 feet, over a pass and down into the valley, and up again 5600 feet and down again, just two lanes winding over the hills through miles and miles of the Colville Forest. On one side of the mountain the forest had been burned out some time ago. Bare tree sticks stood everywhere. But on the other side it was beautiful. The trees out here are so tall and full and dense right up to the road. It was slow going, though, because of the switchbacks and the steep grade of the road most of the time. Sam was getting a good upper body workout driving this rig with the trailer. We stopped at a Wally

World near Sand Point, Idaho for the night. I'm hearing firecrackers in the distance. We missed any celebrations today. The Holiday went by with hardly a whimper. I did wear my American Flag tee shirt all day though.

Leaving the rig at our Wally World in Sandy Shores Idaho, we headed out the next morning with our computers safely stowed in the saddlebags, to check emails at Starbucks. We stopped at a tourist info building and found some things to do in the area. riding along a pretty lake, in and out of several little towns boasting populations of 535 and 672 and the like. I wondered how often they made new population signs. I wondered also what it was like to live out here. They seemed to have quite a few businesses and buildings and all but We saw no big stores or malls anywhere around except the Walmart we'd come from. And that was a long way back. We spent the day in this area which meant two nights in a parking lot. Sam always parks with one side of the rig along a tree lined edge of the lot and it could just as well be a campground as a parking lot, as far as we're concerned. In the mornings there are always other rigs nearby. .

next fun stop: Glacier National Park, Montana, where we have reservations for four days. Getting here was quite interesting… I remembered hearing on the news some months ago that Montana had had huge flooding and parts of the main highway had washed out. I wondered about it and hoped it would be repaired by the time we planned to be there. But here we are, still miles and miles from Glacier, in the middle of nowhere, enjoying the huge sky and flatland as far as we could see, on a nice state highway. suddenly there was no road! It ended and we bounced along in dirt. Sam slowed down, driving on cautiously until we saw someone standing in the distance ahead. We came to a halt beside a young girl holding a big red stop sign. She told us about the road washing out and held us there for quite a while. Then we drove in the dirt from marker to marker. We bumped and rattled along for some time. We thumped up onto concrete again for a short distance and then back onto dirt and rock. We went on like this several more miles. Very strange. We were totally alone, the only vehicle around. We felt like we were in a 37 foot dirt buggy! eventually we came to some people working on the rest of the highway. That was a relief.

Eventually we arrived at Mountain Meadow Campground north of the town of Hungry Horse, Montana. It was 102 degrees! What the heck?!! I thought we were going to the mountains! Our nation's having a heat wave; 115 in Arizona, 128 in Las Vegas, etc. Well, I'd been so cold in Portland and Washington and was asking where the summer was… I've found it. I'll not complain.

But Wow. What a great place this is. Glacier National Park; Going to the Sun! That's what they call the 50 mile road through this park, Going to the Sun.

The first twenty or so miles pass along a lake with wild flowers growing wherever they can along the way. Dense trees fill the opposite side. There are campgrounds and lodges, trails and little villages of stores all along the way. The road is barely two lanes wide but there are frequent pull offs so you can stop to enjoy everything.

After passing the lake, you begin climbing uphill. At the very top of this mountain, or glacier, is Logan Pass. This point is at Alpine height: above where any trees grow. In winter these mountains get covered with ice and snow 20 feet deep, hence a glacier. But on this summer day there was just scattered snow as we wandered around up there. The ride through the park and over the pass and down the other side takes two hours with the 25 mph speed limit. You wouldn't want to go faster as It's very winding and precariously close to the edge much of the way up. There's a stone wall about 12 to 18 inches high along most of the edge. But, what can that do, I wonder. I'm afraid if our bike tire hit that little wall it would certainly catapult us right on over!

. regardless, It was magnificent. From this height we could see half a dozen other mountain tops, each one more beautiful. Most with snow at their peaks.

Meanwhile, on our left, we were getting sprayed with water running down the wall beside us. I don't know where it goes, but there were many little water falls coming down from up high, disappearing right at the road. Gently weeping walls.

We stopped at a nearby pull off at one of these places for a closer look. It's neat how the water just seeps out of the stone and runs down the wall. We saw this also at Zion National Park. They say the water is from snow

melting up top. Water appearing here today actually fell eons ago! We did this road three times and could have enjoyed it many more times.

At the top, Logan Pass, we learned about glaciers and the plants and animals that live up there. No rangers or employees stay there in the winter, it's just too cold.

News about the glaciers was not good; we've known since 1860 they've been disappearing. No doubt since before that… So perhaps we do not cause, or control, everything in nature.

We figured Sunday the park would be extra busy so we took a ride around the outside of it on the regular highway. You know, Sam takes me to only the finest places: so off we go to the goat lick! Yep, goats climb around this particular type of mountain rock that is salty and they lick the walls! We stood on a deck across a ravine from them and watched as a cute bunch of goats scampered all over the perpendicular edge of the mountainside. It was fascinating. We ended up riding 115 miles around to the other side of the park to the little town of Lake Mary. Then came back over the Glacier, through the park again. What a wonderland. Our twenty mile ride that day was actually 185 miles and my butt was hamburger!

We both wanted to get a souvenir or two from here so the next day we did a little shopping. We each bought a sweat shirt and long sleeve tee shirts with Glacier insignias on them. Then we did an easy walking trail in the cedar tree woods. It was relaxing and so pretty. . It might even have been romantic except for the hordes of people on the same trail. Oh well. We got home to the rig early enough to cook some food and unwind a bit . This was a terrific day. Thanks Sam for sharing it with me.

In the next couple days we traveled about 800 miles across some very boring, barren land. They call it Big sky country. Not much to look at, hardly even any animals around. . We drove through several tiny towns that had every building boarded up except one; a bar… where all the cars were.

We passed Great Falls which seemed like a full sized city. Listening to there radio station as we crossed miles of farmland, we actually learned a lot about local agriculture. However, as we went through Billings, Montana, we

noticed nearly every store and building had a CASINO or POKER sign out front.

Eventually we pulled off at a much needed rest area near Lewistown, Montana. To our surprise It was a campground also! No hookups but it had a nice comfort station and actual sites spread out in a spacious manner. The local Kiwanis runs it and asks only for donations. Sam was exhausted from staring into that big sky so we stayed here overnight. By the next night we were in Sheridan, Wyoming, a town Big enough to have a Walmart. Out here that says it all. There's only 11 in the whole state.

A couple hundred miles later we arrived at Rush no more Campground in South Dakota. Yes, we were here in 2004 and it's great to be back. It's such a nice private campground run by a neat family. This evening they had a cookout for everyone who wanted to come and bring a dish. And For seven bucks we had sirloin steak, potatoes and a hundred other dishes. It's fun to meet all the other campers right after arriving. There's so much to do around here We'll stay a week or so

The next day was Friday the 13th. A good day for us. We rode into Sturgis where Sam showed me where he'd stayed in 2001 when he came to the big bike rally with a bunch of guys. Sturgis is a tiny old western town that comes alive for ten days every August, last year hosting eight HUNDRED THOUSAND bikers!! It was hard to believe until I saw the vast acreage where folks put up tents or park their rigs. Even our lovely Rush No More campground will be filled in between every rig with tents. They said last year they had 5000 campers. Thank goodness We're about three weeks too early! We stopped at the Harley store and got several things that not only say Harley but also have a Sturgis insignia on them. Such prestige!

Then we rode to Deadwood. This town got its name when an old prospector found gold and when trying to explain where he found his fortune he said "Up thar in that old dead wood." This is also where Wild Bill Hickock died in his chair while gambling. We went back to a favorite eatery here for lunch. Scrunched between two old wooden casinos is an open space with umbrella covered tables and chairs. An old Indian looking guy sings country cowboy songs and plays his guitar. He's actually fun and funny as he yaks and jokes with patrons. We heard Buffalo Gals and Happy Trails and the like. I wonder how I know the words to all these old songs; maybe from watching

Roy Rogers and Gene Autry as a child. I was always going to be a cowboy, not a cowgirl, mind you, but a real cowboy. Later that day in one of the little stores, I tried on a nice holster and belt with bullet holders along it and a good looking toy gun. It took me back in time…

The next morning we rode the Harley to Custer State Park, about 90 minutes away. We went through Keystone and entered the park via a back entrance. The road we took was definitely different. Suddenly we were winding round and around in a tight little circle while climbing upward the whole time. , we made three circles and then the road straightened out and continued on. We had made a right turn but came out much higher than where we started. Sam calls it 'dotting the I'. I called it a corkscrew. I finally figured it was a means of getting you up to a higher level where the road could continue on its way. It was fun on the bike. So we arrived at the Bluebell Lodge in Custer and we joined a slue of other folks eager to go on a wagon train to a cook out. We each got cowboy hats and kerchiefs and clamored aboard the covered wagons. We headed out across the valley, singing cowboy tunes and laughing.

At one point we had to stop and wait quite a while as a herd of buffalo were roaming around right there on our trail. They seemed disgruntled to have to walk around our wagon, but then I think they get that way when humans are nearby anyway. They walked right up against our wagon; I could have reached out and touched them. They are very dangerous, though, and I didn't want to insight a riot. And Besides , their fur or hair or whatever was filthy and matted. No one would want to touch that. Lots of the mommas had cute little brown baby buffalos romping around them. So far, that was the highlight of the day.

Finally, we arrived at destination: cook out. Inch and a half thick sirloins with all the fixins. Then Live music followed by the hoedown. And of course this included the chicken dance and hokey pokey. As the meal progressed, it was announced that anyone who had ordered their steak 'well done' was to come up to the front of the crowd. Once there, they were hung at the gallows and could have a picture of it.

Their punishment for cooking that beautiful steak until it was dead.

It was fun and we got most of our Yaahooing and Yeehawing out of our systems.

We head for home as the sun was setting and rode thru that vehicle elevator in the dark! What a fun day.

The next day was hot, over a hundred degrees. We relaxed around the campground and visited with new friends. Sam made himself busy helping this one or that one with a problem. I did laundry and a bit of cleaning and listened to my

Book. In the evenings everyone sat outdoors having happy hour as the sun went down. Very pleasant. Then one morning we left our little Rush no More campground and drove through part of the badlands on our way to Wall Drugstore in South Dakota. This old store has expanded into a huge storefront in a little old frontier town. Everyone always asks if you Did Wall Drugstore. so we did it.

We had lunch at the Cactus Café and drove on to our evening reservation.

Mitchell, South Dakota has its own claim to fame; the Mitchell Corn Palace.

This three story building downtown has little turrets at the top that make it look like a palace. It's totally covered with beautiful mosaics made of colorful corn cobs. And the scenes depicted on the sides of this building are changed every year. Plans and stencils are drawn up and after harvest in the fall they begin redoing the whole thing. the walls inside are also covered with these corn mosaics. You wouldn't believe it! Along a hallway we saw large photos of many of the past years works. This was started in 1892 and has been carried on all these years! Each year has a theme about it; this year was rodeo. The pictures were of a round-up, a rodeo, cowboy boots and other western gear. The corn cobs are of eight different colors and varieties, cut in half lengthwise, and put together like tiles. I can't believe they redo it every year. What a lot of work. Check it out online.

July, 2007. Des Smet, LaSalle, House on the Rock, Mundelein.

Today we visited Laura Ingalls home in De Smet, South Dakota. We did the tour with our15 year old guide, Kylie. She was fabulous. We visited four

buildings that were a part of the Ingalls life. A square drawn on the floor of one room showed the size of the shack the family lived in while out on the prairie. It seemed hardly big enough for them all to stand in, let alone live and sleep in. I think it was just ten or twelve feet square. We walked through the surveyor's house where the family stayed one winter. It was a small house with four rooms downstairs, a pantry full of food, a nice staircase instead of a ladder, and three bedrooms upstairs. After the life they were used to, they considered it a mansion. We visited the original school house where Laura and Carrie were students and their teacher was Miss Eliza Jane Wilder. Laura would have been twelve at this time.

A portion of the floor here is the original upon which Laura walked. This one room schoolhouse was pretty spacious and usually held two groups of students. Then we visited a replica of the first schoolhouse Laura taught in when she was 15. It was tiny, dark and gloomy. She had five students, including two that were older than she was. She had to live away from home in order to take this job as it was twelve miles from her home; too far to commute. She was required to work as her sister had recently gone blind and her family needed money. She did get home most weekends.

After visualizing ourselves in her life on the prairie we drove a few blocks away to the house Pa built for them in the town of De Smet. It was nicer, two story with a parlor and all. But Laura never lived there as by then she was married and living away from the family.

The young girl giving us all this info was interesting in her own right. Her father had four daughters, no sons. She's driven tractors since she was eight years old. She drives herself (by car) to work from their farm each day. Kids get drivers licenses at 13 in South Dakota. She doesn't like driving the combine but does it sometimes when her father insists. I volunteered to send her a couple boys for her family. So far, all they can drive is a joy stick! Kids out there certainly learn responsibility early.

After that we high tailed it across highway 14Which has been renamed Laura Ingalls Highway, to Mankato, Minnesota: about 200 miles east. We passed

thru Sleepy Eye and Walnut Grove, towns where Laura and family had lived earlier.

As we travel east it's pleasant to notice large green trees and green lawns. We must have crossed a thousand miles of colorless land. Tomorrow we'll be on the Mississippi River!

The Next day at LaSalle's Riverfront Park we caught a ride on the beautiful Julia Belle Swain; the only steamship paddle boat on the upper Mississippi. This huge three story passenger boat looks like one from 1900 or so. The steam engines on this ship were built in 1915 and put into this ship in 1971 when it was newly constructed. We stood near the engines as they built the steam up to make the paddlewheel work. It was fascinating. We had a ninety minute sightseeing tour on the river. We sat for a while in the beautifully ornate parlor having a sassafras and imagining folks in those long ago days. I can see them now, dining or playing cards while making their passage up the river.

Today was great. perfect weather, sunny and cool. We rode the Harley about fifty miles down route 35 which runs alongside the Mississippi river and through the bluffs.

We rode in and out of tiny towns along the river bank. Some of the populations posted were 176 and 174. I wonder if they have a competition to raise it or to keep it low. We came home to chicken and veggies in the crock pot. I added rice and yum yum.

Moving on In the rig now, we came across a Frank Lloyd Wright info center and stopped there long enough to tour a building he had designed. Hmmm

On down the road we came across "the House on the Rock". Also unusual but not a Frank L. Wright design. We did the simple tour of this place. Not so

simple. This dwelling is built on, around and within a huge rock formation. Most of the walls are actually rock. Carpeted steps take you up and around into many, many different sized and shaped areas. It was very dark, cool and damp. There were small wattage lights in Tiffany style lamps or other ornate lights Every here and there. There were little waterfalls and some music machines from years gone by. Somewhere in the middle of it was an actual kitchen with fairly modern appliances. Just outside the kitchen was a beautiful long wooden table with fur covered benches. Most all the ceilings were low and covered with carpet or fur, for warmth.

Some of the passages from room to room were barely wide enough to get through due to the rock formations. Then there was the crème de la crème. A long narrow walkway cantilevered way out into space, high over the treetops. It was wide enough for about five people to walk abreast at the beginning of it but as you walked toward the end it got narrower and narrower, till it came to a point. You could feel it slightly bounce as you walked ! It was enclosed with thousands of little French window panes the entire distance, even the floor, allowing you to see all around you and down into the rocky crevices below. It vibrated and was very spooky. I was relieved to get back to the rock house part of this whatever. . I found it strange to build on top of a rock on top of a hill and then make it all so dark, cold and cave like. Some of the larger windows were done in stained glass which cut the light down even more and didn't let you see out at all. Sorry, I just didn't get it. It was uncomfortable, claustrophobic and impossible to navigate. Someone's nightmare. Well, that's just my opinion, but I'm sticking to it!

2007 July. Today we arrived at Chain O Lakes Campground in Illinois near my sister and her family. This weekend there's a big shindig for Bunny and Jerry as they're celebrating their 50th anniversary. We came early to spend time with everyone. Sam and I walked around this campground a bit and rode to the dock to watched the boaters maneuver their crafts into and out of the water. Looks like a lot of work. My niece Sharon and her hubby arrived by evening to help settle us in. Sharon's so sweet and Jim keeps us laughing. It was great to see them. We visited till nearly nine pm and they were exhausted. Later I learned they hadn't stopped to eat after work and all we offered them was a beer! Good grief.

It's fun to watch boaters back their trailers into the water giving orders to everyone. We've heard some horror stories: a boat was offloaded with no one holding a line to it. When the owner came back from parking his truck and trailer, the boat was across the lake!

Another one didn't set a brake and his whole

trailer, boat and car rolled into the drink! That was an expensive lesson. We didn't witness anything so drastic. But, all in all, It was a pleasant day.

I did some cooking for the weekend. Made a dish of scalloped potatoes and ham and a crock pot of stuffed bell peppers. Four big peppers. That should ward off the hungries for a while.

Sharon's birthday is tomorrow. She is not only my niece, she is also my only Godchild. This will be the first time in her life I've been with her on a birthday, but we won't mention the 40something of them I missed. The four of us had a really nice dinner together at a restaurant on the water in Wisconsin . It was great; laughing and telling stories. Sharon & Jim are adorable together. A fun couple and I'm very happy for them. The next day Sharon picked me up and we went to Bunny's to help her get ready for the party tomorrow. Her other daughter, Kathy, arrived from Connecticut and we all visited for a few hours and got nothing done. Bunny said everything was ready anyway. A Nice day.

Saturday, the Big Day! Bunny & Jerry- AKA Lois & Gerald will renew their vows.

Our brother Steve arrived this morning from Michigan and we lollygagged all morning as the service would be at 2:30 in the afternoon. The Mass was nice with each of their five offspring having a part in it. I loved hearing some of the old Latin tunes again. Later we congregated at a restaurant and had a great meal. There was plenty of time to chat with folks and relatives I haven't seen in ages. Curtiss & Haley renewed acquaintances with cousins who hadn't seen each other in many years either. And of course Sam loves meeting all my family. He did seem to have a good time. Toasts were made and warm appreciation was extended to and from everyone. It was really a lovely gathering.

Later, tired and happy, Curtiss, Haley and Steve all crashed here with us.

After Brunch at Bunny's house the next morning everyone was departing for home to Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin and points unknown. Sam & I left with Sharon & Jim on our motorcycles for an afternoon ride. Jim had his sidecar today and Sharon was adorable in it. We rode to Illinois Beach State Park on Lake Michigan. I was amazed at their beautiful sandy beach. I thought Florida had a lock on such pretty beaches… Wrong. Later we stopped at their house for a bit. It's beautiful and in a very nice area. Nice high ceilings and some lovely, interesting art on the walls. I always like to imagine someone when talking or writing to them so now I know where Sharon is when she gets my emails or whatever. It was great to see her and hard to say so long. Curtiss and Haley went into Chicago to see friends and spend the night with them in their cabin cruiser and have a cool time. They'll fly back to New York in the morning. All in all, a great occasion and a successful party.

Monday the 30th. More adventures. Seemed like it took five hours to get clear of Chicago. Somehow our route 30 became an historic route and we drove by parts of south Chicago that look like a milkman's route. Sam finagled our way out of there and back into the flow of traffic. We made one unscheduled stop at a FedEx store and popped a package into the mail for Haley. We Found her shoes under a chair this morning. Other than that, this day was unremarkable. Just trudging along to Georgia.

Wally World was our host this evening. We're beelining it today. Anxious to get home now. Crossed the Ohio into Kentucky, parts of Tennessee, some of North Carolina and into Georgia. You know, the eastern states are really gorgeous. The roads are smooth and scenic and It seems so soft and fresh and green. We're glad to be back. We arrived at our site in Paradise Valley and several neighbors immediately came out to welcome us and get us settled. It was great. We could hardly get the rig setup between chats with everyone. How sweet. they missed us! And we missed them. We're happy to be home.

And so our summer adventure has come to an end. It's been fun sharing all our travels with y'all.

Now back to normal.

2007 August in Paradise ValleyCampground .

Sitting here in the rig in Georgia. It's so nice to be home. Everyone's been so sweet. When we arrived several neighbors greeted us before we even got off the street.

That evening was Nick & Jan's spaghetti dinner. They do this once a year and it's always delicious. Sunday we visited Art and Pat in Blairsville.

The next Saturday night was a huge pool party at our campground. I think half the park attended, bringing finger food and their own drinks. Sam, our hero, brought his cornhole game and set it up right on the deck. Everyone got involved sitting all around laughing and cheering. He was so cute being the host. They played till it was just too dark and then some of us danced for a while. Everyone had a wonderful time and talked about it for days.

One day he and I tackled Nancy's little garden since they're not here yet. Grass and weeds were over two feet high! We dug out the larger weeds and then just whacked everything down and mowed it over, leaving just the pretty little tree she had planted last year. It looks rough but better than it did.

Later we walked Bev & Charley's four Westies while They were gone to Cherokee for the day. Art & Pat came by and we had lunch at Glenda's restaurant. It got rainy so we came back and played Yaya for a while. I won. another evening we had dinner at Dwayne & Linda's, along with Bev & Charley, and played Yaya again. I won again. What a brat.

9/11/07. Today is 9 11. It's always pretty spooky. Ten years ago today, 1997, Buddy passed away. And six years ago this day was the Twin Towers Disaster.

Curtiss lives in Manhattan and I sort of worry about that. New York seems like such a target. But he's not concerned so Get Over it Momma!

This month's been fun here. Our Saturday Pool Parties are a hit. Then we had the Labor Day Cook out with BBQ pork being the main course. These gatherings are good occasions for everyone to meet more folks. And there are lots of new people in the park to meet.

Linda & Dwayne work every day on their cabin. Doing, dee doing, and re doing. Everyone works so hard they make us tired. We live in the rig and enjoy life. What's with all this work?

We made a quick trip back to Gainesville with the little trailer full of stuff. It was good to see the new house again. I love it. It's cozy yet roomy. We got with Linda & Ron at their new place near Lake City. They now have a nice large doublewide log cabin on an acre in the woods. Ron can park his semi tractor trailer, the pick up truck, their 5th wheel, the PT Cruiser, and have a shed: all on their own property. We all went to the MooseHall and had a blast laughing ourselves to tears.

Back up in PVC now: We rode the bike to Helen for lunch and to the Fest Hall for music. Shotzi and Lorelai were performing. We just love them. Then Rita & Jim, came from Charleston and We took them to the Fest Hall and danced some more. We ended up doing the jitterbug to the polka music.

The next day we made clam sauce linguini and I think Jim was in seventh heaven. It really was delicious. They left for Cherokee to play with the one armed bandits for a couple days.

2007 October. Time for the annual PVC End O Year bash.

… Days Later: It was the best party ever. Sam did a Trash Can Turkey. No one had ever heard of this and it was Fantastic! Everyone brought their favorite dishes and the food was excellent! . The cranberries had marshmallow and Jello and nuts in them… The sweet potato soufflé was out of this world. We had green bean casserole, corn on the cob ,devilled eggs, mashed potatoes, gravy and stuffing. And then there were desserts, wines and so on.

But best of all was the 18.5pound turkey cooked perfectly under the trash can in exactly 90 minutes! .

We played Corn Hole and visited and after dinner everyone sat around well into the night telling jokes and stories with the campfire blazing. All in all, a terrific day.

Well, the party's over for this year. We left Georgia for the winter.

But We love Gainesville just as much as we love Georgia. Our house is comfortable. I can't believe how lucky I was to sell the house in Sarasota when I did. It continues to amaze me. As usual, Saint Anthony was on the ball when he ordered up this place for us. Thank you also G A. And Buddy, did you help with this?

regarding this house : some things need a little attention.

1. Replace the temporary wall someone installed to close in the breezeway.
2. Make a pretty porch beyond that wall.
3. a biggie. Replace the entire kitchen!

November, 2007. We're settled here in Gainesville for the winter and I'm working on the front door project. Sounds simple enough but… We'll see.

Thanksgiving was at Kim's again and Sam cooked another bird in the trash can so The guys were mostly outside playing with the fire and whatever. Kim and I set up her tree and played with holiday decorations while getting the dinner together. A good day.

At our house I brought my little Christmas tree out and set it on the credenza. That's about all the decorating we're doing for the season. Keeping it Simple.

Linda & Ron are moved into their house up the road in Lake City. On her 60th birthday we met them at Red Lobster where we laughed and talked for two hours. They are so much fun.

2007 December was busy. Packages were sent to Laura and Curt early in the month. We bought vertical blinds for The boys new game room, finally finishing it off.

, We had various dinner parties. Linda & Dwayne from PVC camped nearby on their way south. Also Pam & Russ camped locally and we yip yapped all evening catching up with everything. Audrey & Al came by and we took them to Micanopy in search of treasures and antiques . They loved the Blue Highway pizza.

Kim's birthday dinner was a success at the Red Lobster again. I was amazed as Alex, now 14, rattled on about fishing trips with his dad. He's always acted like he hated fishing. Who knew.

Christmas EVE. The holiday was early since Kim had to work it. A spiral ham and lots of veggies for dinner, and a little gift exchange and everyone was happy. Another successful holiday.

On Christmas day, Sam & I went to Linda & Ron's house in the woods where he did yet another bird in the can! Another fun day. So this whole month has been visiting , eating and partying.

Speaking of Sam's Trash can turkey: This is such an easy way to have a fun and delicious meal with everyone involved. all the guys seem to enjoy it. I especially like it because it relieves the kitchen from most of the mess. No stuffing to prepare and no lugging the heavy thing in and out of an oven. So the kitchen and the oven are available for all the other goodies we like to have on these special days. I say…

Let's Give the guys the bird!

Today, December 31st, Workers are laying the tile floor in our new front room! That's exciting. Sam had previously removed the kitchen sliding glass doors and the original front door that opened onto this

room/breezeway, so you can now walk freely from the kitchen into that room and from there into the hallway and on into the rest of the house.

this room I call the front room was an open ended breezeway. At some point someone had A wobbly wall with a door that doesn't stay closed installed. I'm having a new wall built with a beautiful door and window and the breezeway becomes my new front room!

So ended 2007.

2008 January. Another Happy New Year.

It was a dark cool day in Gainesville, Florida. The kind of day when you'd like to have a hot mug of something and be glad you don't have to go outside. It's grey and ugly out there, warm and cozy indoors.

Little by little, changes are happening in the house. Yesterday we ordered wood laminate flooring for the living room, dining room and the hallway. Last

week we found a gorgeous rug for the living room. I selected a light coffee colored sofa to be delivered later. This will be such a cozy house. I call it our bungalow.

The newly enclosed front room tile has been laid. My dark rattan furniture is perfect for this area. The floor is a slight step down off the kitchen which will be the same cream tile. This front room is 10by15 and makes a nice sitting room at the front door. A place to curl up with a book.

I'd like to mention that because I worked nearly 30 years in Sarasota at Maas Brothers, which became Macy's, I retired with their lifetime employee discount. This has been a huge bonus all these years, especially when shopping for big ticket items like beds, furniture and rugs.

2008 February. We ran up to Georgia for a few days checking the RV out, making sure it was weathering the winter alright. It was neat to be there at this time of year. The trees were bare and we could see the mountains and all the houses that are totally hidden during summer. We walked the entire park and found a few folks that either stay all winter or are here for a short time as we are. Several new porches have been added and new cabins have popped up since last fall. We still prefer living in our rig and using our lot for games and such. It's been rainy and cool some of the time but not bad. Actually very pretty. It's good to get away from the house and construction for a few days.

Shortly after returning to Florida, we drove to Tampa and visited camping friends at Hillsboro River . Gunther & Vivian started this get together and we met up with al & Audrey and Pam & Russ. We lunched at a BBQ and hung out at a pavilion at the park. The guys made a fire and we laughed and talked for hours. It was dark and rainy but that didn't dampen our spirits in the least. A really fun visit. Plus, I found two small tables at a little shop in Dade City, so we came home with treasures as well.

Valentines Day 2008. The usual hearts full of candy showed up but the nicest thing was this:

Sam & I exchanged commitment rings. in our own little ceremony we pledged ourselves to each other. Very sweet.

Demolition began in the kitchen! All the top cabinets were torn out and placed in the garage. Then the two big old pantries came out leaving some ugly stuff hanging from the ceiling. Insulation came down and the dust flew! Now the entire kitchen was empty. No sink, stove, appliances or furniture. bare and dank. To stay out of their way, we went to the garage and got busy installing those discarded upper and lower cabinets against a wall out there. Sam found a long countertop in the junk pile at Home Depot, cut off the broken end and completed a perfect work shop. He is now one happy camper!

The Kitchen linoleum had been scraped up so tile could be laid. We had some really good workers here along with one dud, the tile setter. He was terrible. working extremely fast, he had the whole floor a bit askew, not coming up properly at the extra wide opening to the front room. That threshold had to be changed because of his ineptness. Bill, head of our crew, did a beautiful job overcoming this faux pas. Then the electricians came and worked their magic. We passed inspection and were ready for drywall and plaster. Yippee.

Soon new, beautiful, modern cabinets and fixtures were installed. We love it. The kitchen looks wonderful and is everything I wanted. We painted the end wall with the door to the garage deep green and it sets off the little breakfast area. Thank goodness the slightly crooked tile is unnoticeable.

The flooring in the rest of the living area is also beautiful. The new coffee colored sofa and print rug look terrific with the wood floor. The whole feeling is cozy. My bungalow.

Easter Sunday we christened everything with a meatloaf and mashed potato dinner with Kim's family and watched a hilarious Mr. Bean movie. Everyone enjoyed the day.

Several days later Sam and I went to Kim's with a chain saw and proceeded to dee do the front porch that used to be in front of their door when they had a doublewide in place. Now it's defunct. The two trees that were tiny when it was built have grown so big they're disrupting the porch anyway. We started a bonfire of old wood, steps, benches, and other junk and we kept It going The rest of the day. a job well done. Kim had been trying to get Loyd to do this job for several years but it never happened. He couldn't even manage to locate his chain saw so we rented one. If it's not fun-he's not interested.

Two weeks later, Sam & I were back at her property again ready to sit out by the fire and watch the rest of the lumber burn. Well, we ended up working full tilt again until 5 o'clock that day. We burned a set of steps, two platforms from the old above ground swimming pool, a bench out of the garden, another stack of lumber that had been there for ages and then we began ripping out their old garden. What a job that was! Digging up forms and railroad ties, pulling up plastic sheeting and cutting down dead plants and cleaning up the fence when we finally worked our way back to it. Kim ran the mower over most of the remaining stuff and the garden was gone! We worked out there in the heat and the sun about six hours. I was exhausted. Poor Kim, the next two days she had long shifts at the hospital while it took me and Sam two days just to recover at home.

Another day, With a little actual help from Loyd, Sam installed blinds in their new game room in their new house. Then he reworked their bedroom closet making it much more serviceable. We took several trailer loads of junk to the dump, and generally cleaned up their five acre grounds. We left Loyd's trailer full of trash to dispose of and I imagine it will still be there next year when we come back from the mountains. If it has nothing to do with fishing, bowling, computer games, and now playing the guitar, he won't bother with it.

Back to our own house construction. We love everything that's been done so far , BUT then disaster struck. The other morning! There was water on the brand new floor in the hallway. We'd

been warned against using too much water on the laminate flooring. Even using a Swiffer must be done carefully as the fluid may get between the boards and warp them. So what's happening here? The hallway is soaked! It's

actually squishy! Oh good grief. We had a leak from the new refrigerator. Water ran under the wall and right under all this flooring in the hallway. The boards were already warped and the concrete below was soaked. How'd this happen? Seems the new fridge got hooked up to the water using the line from the old fridge. We found the brand new water line still here, unused. How did we get such an inept worker? Very disappointing.

We had To have the installer remove 72 square feet of new flooring, and the concrete would take two or three weeks to thoroughly dry out. We were in a mess again.

. The last day of the month; March is going out like a lion and now we're really looking forward to going to the mountains for a vacation!

But first, Laura came from Portland for a visit. Together we organized the photos and artwork I wanted mounted on the walls. I'd saved this project for her because she's so good at interior design.

2008 April. She spent one day with little Sam and Kim and both boys came over for dinner. They're enthralled with her. She has a way of identifying with them and they got along well. Since the boys are grounded from using the computer games due to disappointing grades, they're more fun. It's nice. They should be grounded until they're 35!

One morning we girls met Kim at the Ivy House for breakfast. We shopped the consignment shops until lunchtime when we met up with Sam at the Diner in High Springs. Eventually ending up back home for everyone to say goodbye as we, that is Laura, Sam & I, are leaving in the morning for Georgia.

I'm thrilled Kim and Laura had such a good visit. Everyone was relaxed and enjoyed each other.

2008 May. The three of us rode to the mountains with the Harley bike trailer and all our stuff. A beautiful ride on the back roads of Georgia and thru all the cute little towns. From the minute we arrived, in fact even as we were still on the road, friends called to see if we had arrived. It took twice as long to get set up because of all the visiting. Laura was impressed with everything. Everyone is excited to have a turkey dinner in a few days. Friday we took her to Unicoi State Park, Anna Ruby Falls, into Helen for the Reuben sandwich and browsing the beautiful quilts and things. Later we went to Dahlonega with friends for supper and live music. We pretty well wore ourselves out.

Saturday it was back to Dahlonega to my favorite quilt Shoppe, the Appalachian Trader, where I found the perfect spread for our bed. One side is deep autumn colored leaves and the other side is a dark red print. The more I think of it the more I love it. And it will actually be wide enough for our bed.

Sunday Sam helped Dick & Marie fix a trashcan turkey at their place. A 20 pounder, cooked in one and a half hours! It was their first attempt and it came out perfect. You can't go wrong. Lots of friends and food showed up and Cornhole was the hit of the party again. Laura's friend from Atlanta, Ed, arrived in time for all the festivities and we finally met him. Such a nice guy. He and Laura have been email pen pals for many years and this was only their second actual meeting. That made the party even more special. We got back to our rig and Ed took Laura to the Atlanta airport for her flight home to Portland. It was a great week with her and I know she enjoyed every bit of it. .

More folks arrive here daily and we're eagerly awaiting Nancy & Bob's appearance.

I always think of them as the NanBobs, so if I write that you'll know who I mean.

The month is flowing by. We have all our pots full of flowers and tomatoes. We put azaleas and arborvitaes in the ground to grow up some day and hide the shed entirely. It's so pretty.

The NanBobs arrived! It was quite an experience for them. twenty five miles from here their brakes gave out. She phoned Sam for help. He assured them they could limp in after the overheated wheels cooled and he'd check it out. So they got here and we've been having fun bowling and playing bingo and taking walks around the campground with them. It's fun to visit others and see their fancy cabins and rigs. Everyone around here is so busy working on them while we go for bike rides or sit outside and listen to books together. We're trying to show them how to relax. It's tiresome watching all this work.

Nan and I've been to the exercise place, Curves, three times now. I guess we'll join it. I'd really rather do my workout here in the rig, But she wants someone to go with. I admit, it's a fun social time and they're giving us a real good startup deal, so I'll go along with it. Either way it's a workout.

Later... Well, we joined Curves. However, it's costing us more money than we planned on. Every time we go to town to workout, which is three times a week, we end up running other errands and buying more stuff or doing lunch. Oh well, we're giving Sam and Bob a break.

Last Saturday was a big day at PVC; Election of officers. We had Meetings, a cookout in the evening and a pool party were all part of the doings. We're pleased with our new officers. I made up a little ditty using their names and everyone got a kick out of it. We have:

Buck and Bev, Jim and John, and Nick Dicken Angelo!

Hopefully it will be a nice peaceful year around here.

On Memorial Day we had a fish fry at our place. Sam has the huge new cast iron skillet that he was dying to do fish in so we bought a ton of trout and had the gang over. Nan made hush puppies while the fish fried. We had Linda & Dwayne and Bonny & Paul, plus Nan & Bob. Bonny made home made ice cream in her new maker and put it on brownies. We kept the fire going and played cornhole till dark.

A fun day.

Coming up: The Pergola.

2008 June. Sam was asked to be in charge of our dumpster area as no one paid any attention to it and it was a nasty mess. It's next to our property So he agreed. He was dubbed "Chief Garbologist". Besides generally cleaning it up, he's already silenced the squawking sliding doors on each dumpster and made the huge gates work properly. Together we made some attractive signs and posted them at each entrance. They specify the rules of the campground so folks will take their rubbish, their toxic stuff and their yard clippings to the appropriate places.

No one seemed to know where things were to be discarded so they just left everything, grills, fans and junk, at the garbage dumpster. Turns out it is only for garbage, like waste baskets from the kitchen and bathrooms. Who knew?? I have visions of pretty bushes around the fencing to hide the dumpsters a bit. I also envision a pretty pergola nearby, over that old broken slab of concrete where garbage cans stood years ago. Today this area is a mess. An eyesore on the main road in and out of PVC. We need to fix it up. I envision an attractive area with plants and benches and with vines overhead making it comfortable and pretty. A place to sit a spell and chat while taking out the garbage. Our friend, Mel, drew up plans for this PROJECT.

Let's get it going!

Our Florida friends, Russ & Pam, arrived in Georgia at Unicoi State Park for volunteer duty for the next three months. They came to our campground

so we and the NanBobs could show them our wonderful new location. We ended up in Helen eating Reubens by the river. Another fun day.

Bob's cousin Carole, and Mel, have been here for a couple weeks. She goes bowling and to Curves with us. Fun people. We've been doing a lot of socializing : yesterday another fish fry at our place and today linguine at Nan's. Then Sunday a fish boil at Bev & Charlie's. Good thing we go to Curves!

We rode the Harley to Murphy NC the other day to a flea market we heard about. It was disappointing but the ride was great. We met Art & Pat there at a little restaurant called Shoe Booties. Another day we went to Dukes Falls with Nan, Bob, Carol, Mel and their grandsons from Israel, Nat and Didi. It was a gorgeous two mile walk through the woods and hills. and at the end we had the most outstanding views of the falls.

June 26 . My birthday started out with both of us getting our hair cut at Styles & Smiles and going into town to browse around and get breakfast. The new Dixie Diner was terrific and while there Laura called from Oregon to wish me a happy b day. Sam took a picture of me talking to her on the phone and sent it to her while I was still talking with her!

(I mention this because it shows some of the latest technical achievements available these days).

A few minutes later Kim called also. Curt had called his usual 10 days too early so I didn't expect to hear from him. Anyway, we goofed around until about three o'clock when we were due up at Carol & Mel's for a cook out . Nan & Bob came and the grandsons from Israel were there. After a game of cornhole the boys went to the pool leaving us adults to fend for ourselves. We had eaten like pigs and now we topped it off with a juicy watermelon.

Then, when it was nearly dark out, a birthday cake with my name and lighted candles was placed in front of me! My first cake with my name on it. Then

Sam handed me a basket of beautiful flowers. All kinds of bright colorful ones with three roses right in the center. It was gorgeous. Then he gave me three cards. By the time he finished describing the flowers and reading the

cards to me, everyone was in tears. Carol & Mel's card was so appropriate with the Gothic farm couple, Nan's was touching from a best friend, and Sam's just clinched it all: Sitting on a branch were two little lovebirds, each brightly colored and pretty, hugging each other… It was too much.

Pass the hankies please. A fun party with great friends and the best birthday in many a moon.

Saturday Kim and her boys arrived safely from Florida. I say that because Alex, now 15 with a learners permit , drove most of the way here. Over 400 miles on interstate and mountain roads. Whew!

They were nervous wrecks by the time they arrived. I guess they had a couple close encounters of the scary kind.! They were so tired that we just sat around the rest of the day while they recuperated.

At 7 the next morning Mel & Carol were leaving for Texas. I heard a little tap on our door. The poor things had been working for two hours trying to get their drivers seat to move so they could hook up and get going. Would Sam come up and look at this? Their brand new Winnebago had a crimped wire under the seat and was shorting out. Sam fixed it and sent them on their way.

Here he comes to save the day!!

Later we took Kim, Alex and young Sam to Dukes creek and walked the trail to the falls again. It had rained since we were there the previous week and the falls were even more impressive. Then we rode to Helen and feasted on Reuben sandwiches again.

The exciting thing about this day is that Alex drove us everywhere as we gave him advice from the back seat. it was nerve wracking, but we survived. At one point he said he'd need to change his underwear as soon as we got back to the rig. The next morning Kim and Alex left for home and Young Sam stayed with us for a week. so excited to go fishing and on chick patrol with his buddy, Taylor. But just as we were seeing Kim and Alex off, Taylor stopped by to say he had to leave because of an illness in his family. Young Sam's face dropped. What a disappointment. Well, it'll work out. There's lots of kids in the park this week. Later, when he got there,, dozens

of kids were at the pool. He became friends with three sisters near his age. Megan, Lauren, and Erin were visiting their grandparents whom we know and like. . They hit it off quickly and he's forgotten his disappointment already. They all went to the skating rink one evening. Even Big Sam and Big Mike donned skates and had a go at it. Everyone did well and there were no broken bones. After their initial day together these four were inseparable.

One evening they were still playing cornhole when it got dark out. Suddenly the “Great Flamdini” made a special appearance. The crowd grew so big a second show was demanded! Sam was doing his magic stuff.

2008 July. On the 4th folks decorated their golf cart for the parade. With young Sam in his military gear hanging off the back shouting “Support the troops!”, They won 10 bucks! That was followed by the chicken cookout at the pavilion. Later that evening young Sam quietly slipped out into the night. I heard voices out side and Soon fireworks were going off up the hill. some of the parents, including Mike , had arranged this clandestine show for the kids. It was great because none of us oldies wanted to go to town and fight the traffic to see the local fireworks. The next day the girls had to leave. Young Sam crashed on the sofa, exhausted. Later on though, a couple golf carts appeared in our driveway loaded with more girls! Too bad he was leaving the next morning.

That morning both Sams headed south. Loyd picked young Sam up in Perry, Georgia, and my Sam went on to his daughter’s house in Mississippi for a few days. He brought 11 year old Dylan back with him. Here’s hoping Dylan has as much fun as young Sam had.

Meanwhile, I’m enjoying a few days of peace and quiet. I have nice music on and I’ve done a ton of computer stuff. Been in touch with friends by email and some locals have been by to check on me. The TV, computer and washer still work! I even jacked up my own MP3 player. Then Sam and Dylan arrived from Mississippi and the games began again!

They tubed the Chattahoochee and they went into the depths of an old gold mine where they panned for gold and brought home some chips. They rode the Harley everywhere, much to Dylan’s delight. But he had the most fun every day at the pool where the great monster shark lived. This older boy

dominated the pool. You could hear the kids shrieking in fear and laughter a mile away.

One day Sam was about to fry chicken in his prized skillet over the fire. It was seasoned and I ran it through the flour for him. You should have heard the commotion when he realized the batter I'd used was hush puppy batter instead of white flour! But, not to fear… it was wonderful.

When the time came to return Dylan to his folks, the three of us took off in the rig, towing the Jeep. Our plan was to meet his Mom in Birmingham, drop him off and travel a bit on our own. We'd visit friends up around Memphis. But we got only about 25 miles on our local winding back roads when Sam began questioning the rig's braking system. Another 25 miles and we were in the Southland RV Repair Shop! The brakes are shot and it'll take a week to get all the parts here.

Good Bye Graceland and Dollywood. We'll be hanging out in Buford for a spell. The next day we delivered Dylan by jeep to his Mom at the Birmingham Galleria Mall. Then back to the rig at the repair shop. Atlanta traffic was atrocious. this 300 mile excursion took all day. But now we're childless again and it doesn't matter where we spend the time.

At least it's quiet and we don't have to entertain anyone. We set chairs on the parking lot outside near the rig and enjoyed the evening. The next five days we spent checking out Buford and the huge Mall of Georgia. But, Need I say it… with Sam there's never a dull moment. He decided the grey water tank needed to be drained before it backed up into the shower stall so he hooked a hose up to run the water off into nearby hedges so fresh water could be added. You have to get rid of some of it somehow. So he ran the garden hose out to the bushes and turned the valve to let it flow. It sputtered, gurgled and slopped a bit… Until he realized he had hooked it up to the black water tank, the holding tank for the toilet!! Oh Good Grief!! He came charging up the steps, through the kitchen, yelling "Watchout! Watchout! I have to dump this!" He's holding a kitty litter pan of smelly crap!

It was too funny. I opened all the windows and turned the air on full blast while he dumped it back into the toilet. Luckily, no mishaps with that project and no piles left on the parking lot!

After nearly a week at this luxury camp site our brakes were done and we went home. Everyone wanted to hear about our wonderful vacation. What could we say.

We visited Russ & Pam a few times while they were volunteering at Unicoi. We helped Nan spread a ton of gravel over part of their lot. That took a few days but it looks lots better . They finished with a lattice wall around their utilities area hiding it from the street. We gals went swimming while this last bit was being completed. Nan rewarded us with yummy pizza from Mr. Ed's.

Another birthday for Sam. cake and ice cream, a steak dinner, and two identical cards playing The Chicken Dance. They're very cute chickens and the music just makes you hop around laughing. So Yes, that's Sam.

2008 August. We're in the midst of a wonderful cool snap. So neat to put jeans and sleeves on in the mornings. Then It's warm and we run the AC. Around 7pm we turn that off and enjoy nature again. We're still working on getting my pergola built. Everyone goes passed that gnarly cracked piece of concrete daily where I envision a pretty pergola with plants growing up to a slatted top and benches to sit on while we visit. Maybe even some flower boxes. But, as time passes… Oh brother. Politics, what a mess. First the plans are approved and I was told three different times by different people that the board approved it, everyone loves the idea! The president of our association personally collected donations for the building and delivered several hundred dollars to me. I was surprised when this happened. I'd simply made a suggestion; I didn't expect to build the dog gone thing!

But we accepted the money and the challenge. We figured we could get some guys to help.

Then some busybody went around saying the idea had not been approved AT a board meeting and was not put into the minutes of a meeting. I guess it

had full approval at a workshop but not at an actual board meeting. We got over that hurdle at the monthly board meet that Saturday by putting it to the vote. Most of the park was present and it was unanimously made official. The matter was settled. Everyone loved the idea and was happy.

But an hour later, As the meeting was breaking up, our illustrious treasurer had to bring it up one more time. She raised her hand as folks were standing to leave and in her squaawky voice announced: "I just want to say one more thing. People should not… yadda, yadda, yadda."

It had all been covered in the meeting and here she goes again. I wanted to punch her in the nose! She just had to make a grandstand statement. "Folks shouldn't run out and buy lumber before something has been approved." As if Sam and I took it upon ourselves to do this. I figure if three people on the board, including our president, tell me something is approved, I'm not going to challenge them. I accepted their word. Her whole agenda was simply to dig at our president. She's had a running feud with him all summer. I think she thought SHE should have been president in the first place!

But the saga continued. After the lumber and all was delivered to the site, we learned that this greenspace does not even belong to our campground but to our cable company! We'd need their permission to do anything on that ground. Now we're waiting for the owner to come look at what we want to do and maybe allow us to proceed. For the time being we're on hold.

Hoo Boy!

Several days later we were having a drink with Nancy and Bob in their yard when this gal stopped by to chat. I wasn't happy to see her but we visited casually a bit. Eventually, of course, she brought up the subject of the pergola…! I was still steaming about what she said at the meeting. Now She wants to go over it again? I wasn't too forgiving. In fact, I turned in my chair to face her and said: "You know, So n so, I could have knocked you right off your chair at that meeting. I was so angry. You just had to get your digs into Buck, didn't you! I knew if I said anything then about where that money came from you'd have laid right into him, in front of everyone. Anything to belittle him! It was settled. Why did you have to bring it up again?

Buck, our president at the time, was a regular Georgia boy doing what he thought was good for our community. I asked her what a property owner should do if three board members, including our president, tell you something is approved.

She said as president, Buck should have told her they were going to collect money. And maybe he should have, but he didn't know it and she didn't need to bring it up again and again in front of everyone at meetings. There's a better way to do things. She's really throwing her weight around here. I no longer want to be associated with her.

Another bit of news from the campground that has everyone in a dither is this:

a couple had a beautiful cabin built on their lot only to realize in the end that it is infringing on their backside neighbors land. We're supposed to have a five foot easement from our line but a corner of their new cabin is just inches from the line. This has been a huge headache for everyone involved; the owners, the neighbors, the contractor, the architectural board, and White county, all of whom let it happen. The neighbors are being real hard nosed about it. They won't allow an easement for any amount of money, they just say he can buy their whole property. I'm sure he'd give them a deal that would line their own pockets. So now this beautiful four hundred square foot cabin is being lifted and moved a few feet. Consequently this lovely, quiet couple moved out completely. What a shame.

Other happenings: We went to the Orr House for lunch with Dwayne & Linda one day. That was an event never to be forgotten: We walked behind the restaurant and down the pathway to the covered deck by the river. It was lovely back there. However…

The entertainment left a little to be desired. First, a waitress slipped on the wet wood deck and crashed to the floor along with a huge glass tray of hors d'oeuvres. A little later our own waitress dumped her tray with two of our lunches still on it. No one was hurt but, needless to say, the manager was aghast.

Things are interesting weatherwise also. we had nearly 15 inches of rain in four days. It was exciting as the creek rose higher and higher. Our little bridge between the two halves of TCF was closed by the county as the water covered over it. It came up the back steps to some folk's cabins. We had no real problem, just a couple little leaks in our roof which Sam soon fixed. The rain came and went in bands, sun one minute and downpours the next. Then sun and then rain again. It was exhilarating as we'd go out for a walk in the sun and run home in the rain.

But the folks across the bridge had real problems.

2008 September. Sam and two other guys cooked 14 pork roasts for the Labor Day cookout. After chopping them very finely they made Brunswick stew to go with Cole slaw, corn on the cob, and lots more. However, Sam was so exhausted when he got done we just skipped dinner and went home to the ac, too tired to enjoy the fruits of his labor! The next day we sampled all of it at lunch time and of course, it was delicious.

Oops What happened? we lost a few pages here. the end of this month and October 2008 are gone. And darned if I can remember what

happened 15 years ago! Sorry.

Note written 2024: To the best of my knowledge that September and October was consumed with completing the pergola: Permission was finely granted since it would be built on top of that existing concrete slab and not involve underground wires and such. It turned out beautifully with four nice bench seats: one at each end and two back to back across the center and flowers at the ends of each. The roof was slatted with hopes that vines and greenery would eventually cover it. It became a nice place to meet And chat a bit. It was soon dubbed the bus stop although we have no such vehicles in TCF,

2008 November. Our house in Gainesville.

So nice to be home. The floor doesn't shake. The bed's huge and firm. The shower has lots of pressure! Aaah, nice.

I've been cleaning for a week and everything is finally shiny bright and smells nice. There was no chance to do this before we left and the house was just layered in yucky workmen's dust from the kitchen installation.

We've already hooked up with Linda & Ron for a big juicy hamburger at Cowboys followed by a shopping spree. Then Sam spent two mornings hemming a slew of Jeans and slacks for me. Boy, He's good. How many guys do you know who come with their own sewing machine?! A real Jack of all trades!

News flash!! Barack Obama will preside over our country for the next four years. Our first Black American president.

Regarding the house reconstruction: Work began this week on the front porch project. Sam and I thought we'd do some of the preliminary stuff ourselves. but No way! This porch was Franciscan style with open beams across the top, a low wall along the length of it and a dirt floor with a concrete walk down the center. We removed the overhead beams alright but couldn't take out that stucco wall. it was like stone, impossible to cut. About 2 feet high, it enclosed the area to the point that at times it filled up with rain water and overflowed into the front room!

Now we have a pretty patio with a real roof and gutters and a pretty red stone floor set in sand so rain blowing into the area will simply drain out. A whole new wall replaced that rickety one securely closing the front room in. A new door, painted deep red, has a beautiful, big window with a privacy design in the glass. And the new wall itself has a large window, all built with maximum security in mind.

2009 January. Turkey Creek Forest Gainesville, Florida.

We finished the new porch off with BOUNCY black wrought iron chairs, a settee, matching tables and lots of plants. It's inviting and we'll enjoy sitting out there with coffee and friends in the mornings. We love it!

I must say there aren't too many people sorry to see 2008 go away. It was a traumatic year for our country and the world. The only way to go now is up. Soon Obama will be ensconced in office and we'll see what happens. Right now we are in the worst recession since 1930 with our economic system failing. Starting with faulty mortgage companies needing to be bailed out which led to huge banking systems going out of business causing bankruptcies across the country. Our three major car companies are being bailed out and still may not make it. These massive failures have been heard the world over. And things aren't much better elsewhere.

2009 January. We've been hibernating with horrific chest colds for several weeks; taking meds and sleeping. What a bore. Although still coughing, we each feel a little better.

In the meantime Sam, who's forever on the computer, found a 4.5% mortgage rate at GTE Credit Union and I locked in a refi on that. Next week someone will do a new appraisal on the house. That should be interesting what with the drop in home prices and all the refurbishing done on this one. Can't wait to see how it's assessed .

Laura's contract came to an end last week and she thought she was unemployed again. Then the home office sent an email to her office saying "Don't let Laura go!" So I guess they are keeping her on 20 hours a week at her original rate: 45dollars an hour. That's good news. So she's happy and will have time to look around without feeling desperate.

Our country's at a huge unemployment figure now, along with all the other difficulties, so she's lucky. Meanwhile we learned our beloved Smith Barney's being taken over by Morgan Stanley. What next??

Obama was installed in office as President in late January and it went off without a hitch. I admit I had my fears. Not only was it historic but it was fascinating.

2009 February. Nancy and Don Ondraeka left this morning after a couple nights with us. They LOVED our Blue Highway Pizza place and the Cedar River fish restaurant. Great to see them.

In a spurt of inspiration and energy, I planted a cluster of azaleas between Ellies carport and our new porch. Ellie's pretty Dogwood plant is part of the group. I scattered several 12inch concrete squares nearby and set my garden fairy on one, a big potted plant on another and a big green frog on a third one. Also scattered around are several smaller potted plants and decorative rocks and a turtle or two. With the dark vinyl plastic edging I enclosed the area to protect it from a lawn mower. Then with a couple bags of reddish lava rocks spilled throughout, it's beautiful. Ellie loves it-says it's precious.

quickie notes about things happening lately:

Palm Sunday, Had delicious ham with Kim and the boys. Slumdog Millionaire movie. Nice day

Easter. Waldo flea market with L& R. Later chicken on their grill. Fun day.

Leesburg big bike rally- 200,000 people. Met up with Ed. Lunch with L&R in Live (dead) Oak. Rode 180 miles! Sore toosch.

Rode with Linda &Ron to Mt. Dora one Sunday.

May, 2009. Hooray! Hooray!! The first of May! Outdoor intercourse starts today!

I sent this note to my email friends explaining how I'd found it inside my screen door the other day and I thought someone was threatening me. Were workmen on a neighbor's roof up to no good? However, I didn't explain that the offensive word originally meant simply to talk, to converse, etc. And that's what William Shakespeare meant. So I wrote an amendment explaining the word and got some funny responses to it :

Mick said, Oh shucks, and I had such a good time. My friend Joe also claimed to have a great time with all his neighbors that day but since they don't speak English and had medical masks on their faces because of Covid, screaming didn't cause any problem. Oh brother

Another friend replied that I hadn't offended him as he understood the word immediately and he's looking forward to having intercourse with us under the new pergola at PVC soon!

Kathi visited us from Bradenton, via Amtrak, to see our new house. She'd been in 95 degree weather for weeks and consequently packed only shorts, tank tops and flip flops. But shortly after she arrived, We all left for Georgia where it was cool, cloudy and rainy. Somehow Sam mentioned this to someone and soon everyone knew about it. Upon meeting her some asked how she's doing with the sunsuits. Cute… but not particularly appreciated. Later she went on to visit relatives. It was fun showing her our new house and then the place in Georgia. Kathi's A sweet gal I've known since she was

about 13 years old and had a crush on my little brother. That was over 40 years ago.

Upon arriving at Paradise Valley Campground we found it had received a facelift this spring. It was great with new electrical work done in the clubhouse, the deck pressure washed, and the pool drained, cleaned and new tiles installed!

Saturday was the big Memorial Day function and as usual, the food was wonderful and it was good to see so many of our friends. However, another rainy day so no games or music for the evening. Darn.

The planters in the pergola were finished this month. It's done and I promise I'll NEVER make a suggestion to the board about anything again!

Nan & Bob surprised us when they called to say they were here, set up, and could we come over for a beer? We were afraid we'd miss them entirely because they were gallivanting around Mississippi visiting friends all this time and we would be leaving soon. It's always good to see them. Sam put a switch in for their battery the next day and they had us over for a wonderful pork chop and sweet potato dinner. Friday evening we shared jambalaya and Saturday Pat & Skip cooked dinner on the grill. Everyone enjoyed the campfire well into the evening. But they were all sad we're leaving in the morning for a couple months as we travel west again. Everyone but us...

We're excited!

Late May. We left Georgia to make our way west. This time heading to Texas and then across the southern states to California.

After the prerequisite visit with families we veered southward stopping in historic Vicksburg, Mississippi, and other places of interest along the way. We toured the Coca Cola museum and learned about the fellow who initially began bottling coke. In 1894 he owned a general store with a soda fountain. Coke was available only in fountain drinks at that time and customers

wanted to be able to take it home or have it delivered. He began bottling it. He sent it to the head of Coca Cola in Atlanta. It was a hit and the rest is history.

we visited Vicksburg's Court House museum and we drove around the area seeing many of the gorgeous antebellum homes. Later we tried our hand at the casino on the river. As usual, that was a bust. But any time we come out even, we feel we've won!

Texas. The names of the roads here are unique; the signs each had letters followed by a number. We learned that CO meant county, Fm=farm to market, OSR=old Spanish road, OST=old Spanish trail, CR=county road. And some were simply marked Texas Highway numbers. In spite of a little confusion, we found our destination and we were in Brenham, Texas, at the lovely ranch style home of our good friend Carole. (So Sorry to say, her sweet husband Mel, passed away since last we saw them.)

We had a fun time these few days with her and her friends, Theresa and Ken. We met them when they stopped by to pick up their dog Carole had been caring for while they were away. These three together are real live wires, full of vim and vinegar. Lunch with them was lots of laughs. It's wonderful when you meet someone and just hit it off!

Carole took us to the Houston Space Center. We were amazed at the sight and magnitude of these rockets and capsules and the rovers and everything else on display. They had a Saturn V missile and I swear it was a quarter of a mile long. Each of the five rocket boosters attached to it were as big as the capsule the astronauts were in. We saw mission control where they actually were in contact with our space station. We touched a piece of moon rock. Everything was so fascinating.

The next day we saw a 1914 cotton gin run by a 16ton Bessemer engine. This is the oldest still operating gin in the world. I can't believe I never figured the gin in cotton gin is short for engine! Our tour was excellent and fun due to our guide, a sweet little old lady in period dress who is also the curator of this museum. She was full of humor as well as knowledge. I happened to have my pink Hog Honey tee shirt on and she called me Honey the whole time. "We'll let Honey try on this cotton pickin bonnet and these

cotton pickin gloves and put on this cotton pickin bag and we'll let her pick some of this cotton." So somewhere there's a cotton pickin picture of me pickin cotton!

Carole lives near Brenham so one day we visited the nearby "Washington on the Brazos". This is a monument near the river where the Texas Declaration of Independence was being signed at the same time the Alamo was being attacked 150 miles away. There's a nice museum here depicting Texas history. It was neat to learn all about this and then visit the Alamo the next day.

Our next stop was San Antonio Texas. We settled in at Travelers World Campground and went to town to find the River Walk. What a unique idea. The amazing thing about this area is It's about twenty feet below the streets. We parked down town and walked along the shops a bit until we came to an opening between two buildings. There a staircase took us down to the River Walk. This is a different world. As you descend you notice the temperature drops; it's refreshingly comfortable here. The city had diverted a portion of the Brazis River to wind through This wonderland beneath the town. This canal runs beside a stone walkway with beautiful bridges crossing above it. There are eateries from cafes to high end restaurants down here. Plus access to the stores above.

The entire Mexican motif area is shaded by overhanging tree branches. Plus Thousands of plants scattered throughout. We rode a water taxi where we learned most of this history. At Michaeleno's I had my first marguerita. Yummy.

It was crowded here though. we walked elbow to elbow and had to be careful not to fall or knock someone into the water, which is only three feet deep anyway

The next day, the Alamo. It's hard to imagine THE fort as it was back in it's historic time because all that's left of it is a small building containing historic information. There was no docent enlightening us so I have nothing much

to report on it. I can say: today the grounds around this little part of it are beautifully manicured with local fauna, many cacti and such. Not like the Alamo of the cowboy movies I remember. This building was filled with artifacts and memorabilia one could study .

Early the next morning we went back to the River walk while everything was still foggy and quiet. The sun was just beginning to reach down into the area. With no one else around, it was gorgeous. Just a bit of sunlight shone through the fog. We enjoyed the fabulous bridges and walkways and everything. We had a real Mexican lunch there by the river. Afterward we walked to Lolita, a little village of Mexican shops. We browsed a bit But soon it became too HOT so we headed back to the AC of the RV and chilled out. Had a nice salad for supper and made travel plans for the next day.

Route 10 in Texas is not the most exciting land to cross. Nary a soul for six hours. We lost ourselves listening to our books. Looking forward to Wally World at Fort Stockton tonight. Then we'll be at Carlsbad Caverns where Sam wants to do the tour. I'll stay behind and make a pot of chili. Like we need chili in this weather! But I feel the need to get some food into the fridge.

We spent the next weekend in Carlsbad, New Mexico. All I can say is Hot, hot, hot! Sam enjoyed the Carlsbad Caverns. He said it was "Awesome". I wouldn't have done well in there so I stayed in the rig jotting down notes in my journal. It's dry, dusty and drab here. I can't imagine anyone coming here to live of their own free will. Pretty miserable to my way of thinking.

But An interesting thing happened when we went to see the bats come out for there evening romp. We drove up the hill to the bat cave. Once the crowd got settled in the natural stone amphitheater to hear the ranger talk and to watch the bats, lightening began flashing off in the distance. immediately they evacuated the area. Guess we'll have to get a video on that.

Phoenix to Malibu.

Heading west toward Phoenix and a visit with some Sarasota friends. Luckily we'd been advised of a scenic route in that direction and didn't stay on the desolate route 10.

This new route took us out of the dry dust bowl and up into a lovely cool oasis with a pretty winding road among green trees. Signs said we'd entered a National Forrest. The temperature dropped over 20 degrees as we toured upward. What a nice surprise after days of heat. At the top of this hill, or mountain, was a small settlement called Cloudcroft. We pulled off at a scenic overlook. Way, way out there and down over the hills below, you can see sand blowing around in the wind. It looks just like clouds drifting around down there. An interesting illusion.

We passed thru Las Cruces where the Air Force fighter testing facility is located. This area is totally white sand with huge dunes piled up against the fences bordering the grounds. We continued another 300 miles with nothing but dust, cacti and brown brush to report. I was wondering what in the world had possessed my friends to leave Sarasota and move out here. Then we arrived at our destination, Canyon Vista RV Resort, in Gold Canyon, Arizona, near Phoenix. This resort has 560 sites and There was only one other site occupied…

. That's summer in Arizona!

We had a fun reunion and cookout with Marianne & Pete at there house And by the end of the next day we understood what had lured them to this area. Their home Is lovely in a nice subdivision. Their back yard is unique; a huge floor of large square tiles is surrounded by plants and enclosed by a pretty but very strong wrought iron fence that allows them to enjoy the view of Superstition Mountain. All the land behind them is part of the mountain so they have no fear of new development back there and will always enjoy the wildlife and the serenity of the Mountain View. I understand the fence was not just for decoration, certain local wild animals must be kept away from the house. The next day they took us up Superstition Mountain, stopping here and there where we could look down at boaters and picnickers otherwise hidden from view among the boulders and fauna. We had lunch at a little restaurant at the very top of the mountain and we drove to a museum depicting many old movies. Quite a few westerns had been shot on location here as this was an actual movie set. Even Elvis once did a church scene here. The barn walls held photos of many actors who'd passed

through. There were actual footprints of some of them. We visited the little chapel and we wandered around town viewing machinery of that period; there were two full size horse statues hooked up to a rickety stagecoach, and lots of interesting old west stuff was there to remind us of those thrilling cowboy movies we loved. A pleasant step back in time.

We drove on to another full size, old west ghost town: not a movie set but an actual town, long since deserted but currently being renovated. Some of the stores were already updated and open for business. They say it's busy here on week ends. We went into the saloon and had a cool drink. We passed the brothel but they wouldn't let the guys in. They wouldn't take applications from Maryann or me either! I guess business was just too slow.

It's beautiful here with its mountains and boulders and flowering plants. We experienced the dry heat phenomenon Arizona boasts of. We sat outdoors visiting that afternoon right into the evening. At 89 degrees, it was totally comfortable. How bout that!

The next morning we had a shock. Sam pushed the button to bring the big slide in. the motor groaned and died. Now what? I dashed outside and pushed on the slide as hard as I could while Sam worked the button. (Hey. (What's wrong with this picture?) Anyway, inch by inch it crept in. Looks like we'll need a new motor. And next time Sam can heave ho on this slide, I'm pretty sure I can push that button!

We arrived at Ventura Beach, California a little worse for wear.

Crossing the northern part of Los Angeles was harrowing. And what a difference in the weather! The past two weeks it was over a hundred degrees every day. suddenly it can't even reach 70! We set up at Ventura Beach RV Campground, just a 20 minute walk from the town of Ventura. This is the most expensive campground we've encountered so far. It seems all State Parks out here are geared for small rigs and tents. There was nothing for us. So our usual 12 to 15 dollar sight shot up to 60 bucks per night! But I really wanted to spend some time in Malibu so we bit the bullet. It'll all work out.

We browsed Main street for a while reading the menus posted at the eateries and searched the antique and consignment shops for that much needed article we didn't know we needed. All we bought is a new flavored bar of soap for the bathroom. We had a nice dinner at Spinnaker's. By evening it was even colder and I was thankful I had my Tinkerbelle hoody with me.

In the morning we continued by car, south From Ventura Beach on the PCH to Malibu. What an adventure! We walked the beach at Malibu for a bit, something I always wanted to do.

later, thinking of lunch, we turned toward the water at a road marked Beach Access- Broad Beach, Malibu . Sam suggested we might find a seafood shack on the beach down here. But this was just a narrow lane that sloped downhill a bit and then turned right to run parallel to the road we'd just come from-the PCH. Now we barely squeaked past cars parked behind a long row of attached homes on our left. We could see only their garage doors and roof tops. The houses were built facing the beach and were even lower than this street. We drove a mile or two behind this strip of connected homes and Then our road turned right again, back up onto the PCH!

Later we learned this was the most famous strip of homes in Southern California!

Stars like Goldie Hahn and Kurt Russell, Walter Matthau, Pierce Bronson, Steven Spielberg, Dustin Hoffman, Sally Field, Robert Redford, Sly Stallone, Valerie Bertinelli and Eddy Van Halen own these homes, just to name a few. We learned that there are more stars in Malibu than in Los Angeles. Later, when Sam Googled this street he saw that those actually were a line of large, attached homes facing the Pacific Ocean and were some of the most expensive residences in Malibu!

Continuing up the PCH, we took a turn up Bird View Drive where homes were totally hidden by the hills and natural fauna. There's a national preserve there and a narrow footpath down to the water. We parked in a tiny lot and went about half way down to a small landing where We chatted with a girl out running with her dog. She was sweet as she told us all about Malibu. She explained about that strip of homes on Malibu Beach. She said we were very lucky to find THEE most beautiful place in all of California right here

where we were standing. She'd chatted with us for half an hour or so till Sam tentatively asked if she was someone we should recognize. "Oh No, just a mom of three" she said as she quickly scooted away with her dog.

Far below us at the waters edge folks speared fish and did their thing. This really is a beautiful place in the world.

We drove on into Malibu and found an old, rickety looking fish house called The Reel Inn. This might be good for lunch. it didn't look like much. Sam said it wouldn't be too expensive. I said This is Malibu, figure on 60 bucks. Then we realized they had valet service. It turned out this was the type of place where you walk up to the counter, place your order and find a table. We had a nice enough lunch for only 47 dollars. I felt we got off cheap.

But we're still amazed at how cold it is here. Jeans, sweaters and windbreakers required.

2009 June The Hearst Mansion.

We left Ventura Beach and settled in at Cypress RV Campground in downtown Morrow Bay, California. This cute little town on the bay is North of San Louis Obispo and south of the William Randolph Hearst Castle and San Simeon.

A humongous rock juts out of the water in their harbor. This rock is a landmark of sorts and they claim it's a plug on top of a volcano. Thank goodness it just sat there during our visit! There's a boardwalk thru town and out around that rock.

We took two of the Hearst Castle tours and watched an IMAX movie about his life. An amazing place, The mansion is at the very top of a mountain overlooking the Pacific ocean. He has an interesting zoo there. Both of our tours were of the living quarters. We saw the main rooms of Casa Grande, the kitchens, his private living quarters and his sweetheart's quarters connected by a sitting room way up in the top towers of the castle.

Outdoors I noticed the wide lavish staircases all around the castle. Tons of concrete shaping these elaborate steps and the swimming pools. But inside

the manse it seemed we were constantly going single file, up narrow steps winding up and up into their quarters or down, down the back stairs to the kitchens. Really like a castle of olden times. Of course every room was remarkable with ancient artifacts and every ceiling was a work of art brought here from some fabulous home or castle in some other country. The Roman swimming pools, indoors and out, are magnificent.

We spent several days here in Morrow Bay touring and relaxing. We drove up to a state park called Montana State Park (pronounced Montanya). And then down to the beach where we walked in the wind and fog. I stood there looking out at the sea feeling like I was the sorrowful woman in some movie, just getting over a heartache. I fancied myself an actress while

Sam busied himself scouring the beach for pretty purple stones for me to polish and save.

The next morning we head further up the coast on the PCH. This was Quite an adventure in itself, especially in a large rig towing a car. This road follows the coastline, But OMG! what a coastline it is! Picture this:

huge mountains of rock jutt straight up out of the ocean. Not a nice smooth wall of rock but a rough, craggy, uneven bunch of rock that earthquakes disturbed eons ago. Man comes along and decides to hack out a little shelf along the edge for men and their donkeys or horses and maybe carts. then with a little more hacking, cars can use this route. Then along comes more men in their trucks, then huge motor homes! And they all decide to take this route around the mountain. Yikes.

It was actually a beautiful ride and I'm glad we did it… but never again!

Thankfully we were going north, riding against the mountainside. At times we were low, close to the ocean. Then we were a mile high looking down the craggy side of the rock. All the while the road zig zagged in and out of the mountain as it followed the edge of the rock. Into the gloom of the mountainside we went and suddenly we were blinded by the setting sun as we faced west again. Quite invigorating! Thank you God for Sam's steady hand.

Note: Years later I heard of an area called “Devil’s Slide, a similar ridge around a California mountain known to slide off into the Pacific Ocean! We didn’t realize how we were testing our Angels that day!

Thank goodness, these days there are tunnels through the mountain making a shorter safer route.

We drove through Big Sur, the area south of San Francisco. The Spanish had named it something like Grande South which has been shortened to Big Sur. This was an interesting area because after so many miles on those craggy rocks we’re now on terra firma in a forest of trees with civilization nearby. Phew!

Pushing on, BY afternoon we were in Mountain View, south of San Francisco. We’ll spend a couple days here until we pick Kimarie up at the airport. While waiting we did a little sightseeing on our own. Leaving the rig in our Sears Parking Lot Campground with several other boon dockers, we drove thru San Francisco by car checking out the route we would take later with the rig. Didn’t want to get stuck in any of those downtown streets with it. Got to the Golden Gate and worked our way back to the wharf. As usual, at 10 in the morning it was freezing cold out so we had a bowl of hot chowder. Then we embarked on a wonderful, crazy, city tour. Our bus driver was a hoot. He gave us plenty of time to investigate the Golden Gate Bridge. We walked all around beneath it and up on top of it. We spent a while browsing at the Exploratorium there. I loved riding around looking at all that wonderful architecture. And it’s even better when someone points everything out and tells you it’s history.

Later as we were going up one of those super steep San Francisco streets, our driver, Mike, brought that old bus up to some fantastical speed, all the while shouting “Get your cameras ready, get your cameras ready!” All of a sudden we flew over the top of that hill and were airborne till we landed halfway down the other side. Everyone gasped like a car full of kids. He said if anyone asked if he did that to tell them their driver’s name was Roberto! What a wonderful two and a half hour tour. And it was especially great Sam didn’t have to navigate and could enjoy it as much as I did.

Later in Sears I bought some Reeboks but left my flip phone there on the counter. When I realized it a moment later and went back, no one had seen it. Except the one who picked it up.

This caused a little concern until Sam remembered that we had our old phones with us and could use them. The nearby phone store switched my info and I was back in business. Lesson: don't be too quick to get rid of an old phone.

Mendocino and the Rogue River.

WE collected Kim and drove to Caspar Beach, California, near the hilltop town of Mendocino. We were here before and wanted her to see the area. Afterward we followed the footpath across sea prairie to the Point Cabrillo lighthouse where we had an informative history lesson.

We realized later we could've walked just a few steps up the road if we'd come a different direction from the parking lot. Oh well.

We visited the sea lions in the Pacific Ocean at McKerritcher State Park. They've installed miles of boardwalk over the grasses to keep visitors from trampling everything. We watched down to the ocean as the seals and sea lions sunned themselves on the rocks nearby. Deer and squirrels and other wildlife enjoyed this protected area. As we visit these parks and beaches I'm surprised to see osprey, sea gulls, cranes, and palm trees; did we really leave Florida? The only thing different was that we constantly watched for whales. Didn't see any that day. Another big difference, however, was that even though the whole country is suffering from a 100 + degree heat wave, we're freezing out here! We traveled on, heading for Humbug State Park in Oregon. Again the road was very crooked as we climbed up and down the coast. We passed thru the "Avenue of the Giants" where the great Redwoods stand in all their splendor. We were awestruck; thoroughly enjoying these wonderful sights. We arrived at one of our favorite places, Humbug Mountain and Campground near Port Orford, Oregon. It has access to a cute little beach that has tsunami warnings posted everywhere. We allowed Sam his usual 2 minutes to get us hooked up and camping before walking to the

beach. It was about 5 pm when we approached the area and we were nearly knocked over by the winds howling between the huge boulders. Our pathway from the campground took us under a roadway bridge. Looking up I wondered: Is that part of the PCH? This area is strewn with large dead tree trunks and debris from the ocean rushing thru it. Warnings of high waters are posted here. As we climbed up and over a rise in the sand we saw the ocean right there in front of us.

Here is a wide inlet surrounded by huge rocks and cliffs. The sand is fine light brown but the beach looks rugged with its seaweed and driftwood and huge old dead trees that had been pushed and shoved up along the boulders and sand drifts. We walked along and talked with some guys fishing and just enjoyed the natural coast for a while before heading back to the calm of the campground.

Even in the ruggedness of Mother Nature, this is beautiful.

During this trip we've stayed in several private parks for different reasons. Often they are called resorts. Privately owned, They must make money so often rigs are crammed side by side so close together awnings cannot be deployed. Usually they're on gravel and concrete, no grass or bushes. Okay for a simple overnight stay. State parks in California are often small, day use only, and not set up for larger rigs. On the other hand, Oregon's parks are gorgeous with Lots of trees and hedges and grass that provide a feeling of privacy and comfort. So I was thrilled to see Humbug again and happy that we'll stay here a whole week. And why is it called Humbug? Well, the founder of Port Orford, Mr. Tichenor, once sent a contingent to explore the area but they went the wrong way. The mountain, once known as Sugarloaf Mountain, became Tichenor's Humbug to palliate their misdeed. It since has been shortened to Humbug Mountain. Rising 1800 feet out of the sea, it has hiking trails to its summit.

On our first evening here we rode to Port Orford for fish & chips at the Crazy Norwegian. The next few days were relaxing. kind of a forced R&R for Kim, who is used to being constantly busy. I had suggested she bring a book or two and she HAS found time to read a little. We made a couple meals so we'd have leftovers for the next few days. One was my current fave, Skillet Lasagna. Then Laura arrived from Portland with her Chihuahuas. So much for R&R. Now we had four of us in the rig plus two pups. It was fun THOUGH.

The next morning, wearing hats, coats, scarves and gloves, we, of the two legged variety , headed out bright and early. We were going to Gold Beach where we'd take a jet boat ride up the Rogue River. Years ago This was a mail boat run. They delivered mail to hard to reach communities, ending up at Agnes, Oregon. Today the four of us shared the boat with 6 other folks on this beautiful, informative and fun 32 mile run . Our driver, Sean, was born and raised here and knew everyone along the way. Folks were fishing in small boats or just waving from shore. Sometimes he'd cut the engine and coast along, silently pointing out the bald eagles nest or some tiny baby ducklings. We sat quietly and watched a bird catch a fish that was too heavy for it to fly off with. Sean used his golf monitoring voice as he pointed out the buzzard waiting nearby for that fish to be released. He saw things we never would have noticed. Then he'd say OK, Hang on! And we'd suddenly spin a full circle around in the water and take off up the river again.

The further inland we rode, the warmer it became. Hats, coats and sweaters were stripped. It was so warm in Agnes that a simple tee shirt was perfect. We did lunch there and shopped for sun screen and visors. Soon we started back. Little by little everyone put their hoodies and coats on again, hardly able to believe the dramatic change of temperature. It was still freezing at Gold's Beach. We all agreed it was a super terrific experience.

The next day Sam Wanted to show the girls the Cape Blanco Lighthouse. This is The only lighthouse still in service where you're allowed to go up and see the construction of the Fresnel lamp. (Pronounced Frenell.) Augustine Fresnel was a French physicist who invented this lamp in 1823.

It has eight sides, four sides being actual lenses. Originally this style lamp was lit by oil.

It's amazing how the glass prisms amplify the light to be carried so far out to sea.

Next we drove through the luscious Cape Blanco State Park. Here, in my opinion, things took a turn for the worse . Sam noticed an opening off the road and turned left onto a little downhill path toward the ocean. It was narrow, rough and rocky with limbs and debris scattered everywhere. The

Jeep tilted and rocked precariously. We squeezed thru a section and skirted around and over stumps and rocks, Finally emerging onto the beach. I was told this was hard packed brown sand. but I could feel the wheels sinking into the sand. I didn't like this and complained loudly about the danger of getting stuck. But to my surprise, The girls were enjoying this! We drove a ways before finally turning around. This was even worse. now we were even closer to the water's edge. And who knew if it was low tide or high!

Just get me out of here!

We squiggled our way back up that path and luckily didn't meet another idiot trying to come down. And Sam finally got to use his four wheel drive and even granny low. Goody for him.

We spent some time with the girls at the Hughes house where he'd taken me in 2004. Early settlers information is always interesting and we enjoy visiting historic places. On our way back to the rig we stopped at a grocery store and picked up steaks and stuff for our 4th of July cookout. Another fun day on Oregon's coast.

Kim flew back to Florida the next evening. We'd had a good visit and she loved traveling in the rig up the coast. Compared to her experiences with tents and pop ups, she's convinced this is the way to camp!

Laura and the pups left for home and we followed a few days later. Then a friend of hers from California stopped by. Marty certainly added to the festivities. Everything he said or did was hilarious.

One evening after a luscious cook out we wore off all those calories just by laughing!

Finally we had a Mall day. Laura and I each got a couple pretty sun dresses now that we've moved over into the heat wave. and Sam got a new kitchen gadget of some sort. We noticed an Eagles Club nearby so Friday evening we went dancing. Great fun. I love these old folks clubs, the Moose and Eagles. They start early and by 10 we go home tired and happy. That's what I am, tired and happy.

Portland. I mentioned last week that Laura and I purchased sun dresses so we could endure the extreme heat currently crossing the nation. While we were freezing out on the coast, Portland was over 95 degrees every day so We bought sun dresses. Now we're here in Portland and the temperature barely reached 66! What the heck? It was so dark and drizzly cold out we just settled in the rig with pillows and blankets and the pups, munching goodies and watching movies. The sun is scheduled to come out again next week and we can't wait.

Yes, finally! A bright sunny day for watching the wind surfers at the Columbia River Gorge. We sat on the grassy bank watching as folks got all their gear out, inflated their sails, don their wet suits and tried their luck. Dogs were having a heyday running around chasing toys and getting their feet wet. One little guy, 9 or so, tried valiantly to get his board going but it looked pretty hopeless. Some with more experience didn't do much better. Sam used to wind surf off the Clearwater, Florida shore and can attest as to how much strength and energy it takes to get up on the board and get going. I could never even get my butt up out of the water to ski behind a boat so I can't imagine doing this wind and kite sailing thing. It's pretty to watch, though, and this is a beautiful setting for it.

The Hood river and the Columbia river join here and the town is on the hill overlooking the fun. We browsed the shops and when we found the Full Sail brewery we stopped in for lunch and a taste of their beer. We liked Sessions Lager and our guide at the plant assured us a full truck of it had left yesterday for Florida. It's sold right in our own little Publix market. Good to know!

One evening we took Laura to the Eagles Club near our campground. They were doing karaoke; a favorite of hers. And no wonder , she was terrific! She did three numbers, the Eagles, Patsy Cline and Cher. The crowd loved her. Sam and I ditty bopped quite a bit and again tried to learn the Texas twostep. Still no go on that. Folks there were friendly and it was fun.

We browsed in The Racks: a Nordstrom store where all merchandise is 50% or more off. If its on sale, . it gets sent here. We each found something we couldn't live without.

By the end of the week we began enjoying the swimming pool again. The first day Sam and I both shrieked when our big toes touched the water. We elected to sit in the chairs like real grandparents. But Laura chided us for being wimpy and finally we joined her. actually it was perfect. Another day her girlfriend with two little girls were here and everyone had a blast in the pool. We did a hotdog cookout with them, finishing up with watermelon and DQ dilly bars. Then Sam turned to us with his watermelon teeth. Apparently this is how little boys in Georgia amused themselves. Everyone was stuffed, tired and happy. Eeeeuw. Don't kiss me with those things!

2009 July. Crater of the Moon, Idaho Falls, Yellowstone. And the end of our Portland experience. We sure had a fun two weeks with Laura and the pups. No more commitments or deadlines. On our own and on the road again!!

While heading for Yellowstone we came across a cute little campground called the Oasis snuggled down near the Snake River . But the next day was too weird…

We got off the interstate and took highway 20 toward Idaho Falls, a more direct route to Yellowstone. We prefer riding through real countryside whenever possible. We were tooling along across miles of pasture land when we began to see black spots on the ground up ahead. We slowed down as we approached this strange ground covering. then clumps of black appeared all around us. Soon we were in the midst of large and small black rocks. Our highway with its skinny white line in the center cut a path through this area, thank goodness for the folks who cleared our path. this rocky ground totally engulfed us. Weird. We drove several miles with this phenomenon all around us before we came to a little marker that didn't tell us much about it but we understood it was lava. The sign pointed out the hazards our pioneers endured maneuvering their wagons across these huge slabs of rock. I can't believe they got across it at all! One slip to either side could topple their whole rig. This land is not only covered with lava but all the different sizes and shapes of the rock are melted together across the

ground in a solid piece. It's called Crater of the Moon. Several miles into this phenomenon it changed a bit. Now the black rocks were just scattered here and there. Several big hills were totally black and others had only black streaks. We finally came to an information center where we learned more about this; Over 2000 years ago there were dozens of eruptions that spewed this lava all along here caused by movement of plates deep in the earth. We're about 200 miles from Yellowstone but some of these reactions are related. Neither Sam nor I had ever heard of this Crater of the Moon. It was eerie, yet fascinating. I'm glad we didn't miss this, but I really can't imagine how those settlers ever crossed it in their primitive wagons. I wonder what they thought it was!

We made it to Idaho Falls early in the day and got settled. Later we drove by car around the town and happened onto a concert in the park. With the falls as the backdrop, we found tree stumps to sit on and had a lesson in bagpipes and snare drums. Interesting.

The next day Sam legally became a senior citizen. Happy B Day Sam! That got him three bucks off admission to the tram at the Grand Tetons this afternoon. Yep, we were at Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Leaving the rig in Idaho Falls we drove the Jeep about a hundred miles to Jackson. Seems like Thomas Kincaid must have hung out around here. We saw such gorgeous variations of mountains, the Snake River, and little cabins nestled in the trees like some of his paintings. Jackson is built around it's main square, an open park with wooden walks for folks to cut through or just rest on the grass in the shade. We found a spot and caught forty winks. Each of the four corners of this park has a big tall arch to walk through and the rest of the park has a low, pretty railed fence. These arches are made entirely of antlers, woven together in a unique fashion. The wooden sidewalks continue throughout town. Just adorable.

Teton Village, also known as Jackson Hole, is twelve miles up the road. A touristy little place for food and souvenirs at the base of the Grande Tetons. We took the tram up an additional 4100 feet. That put us at about 10,000 feet where there was still snow! We walked around a bit marveling at the view. But for Sam, The new tram system that opened a few months earlier, in December 2008, was more interesting than any view. He watched the

mechanism and the great wheel as it worked hauling a hundred people on its nine minute run. I can imagine winter when everyone with their parkas and skis and poles cram together for a day on the slopes.

"Um, excuse me ma'am. Your pole is poking me in the--- "

They still have a regular ski lift but it probably seems like forever getting up to the top on it these days. Plus, in the tram there's no biting wind and cold. Not being a skier, I much prefer our summer experience. But Whether viewed from the bottom or the top, winter or summer, the Tetons are magnificent. We rode back to the rig fully satisfied with our day's adventures.

Oops. Another experience with the slide out. This time I stationed myself inside at the button and let Sam do the pushing. But now it didn't work at all. Must I go out there and show him how to push?

Using a lever beneath the slide, he crank the thing all the way in by hand, inch by inch. Either the motor or the switch is shot. A switch would be cheaper. Let's get back to the battery problems, they're easier.

Our next stop was the Pony Express RV Park in West Yellowstone, Wyoming.

This private campground is at the entrance to Yellowstone National Park just a block from downtown West Yellowstone. Such a bustling little place, it reminds me of Key West with all the tee shirt and novelty shops and café's and grills. Here the novelties are all western oriented though, instead of summer gear. There were two live theaters so we bought tickets for the next evening. In the morning we did the north loop of Yellowstone. This is one heck of a BIG park. I remember how devastating it was five years ago with the forest fires. Well, this northern loop is entirely different. A beautiful ride with overlapping mountains and huge canyons. Lots of trees and meadows. We saw elk and adorable buffalo calves nursing from their Mammas right near the road. We stopped at Tower Falls for its view and had lunch at nearby Mammoth Hot Springs where I had a bowl of delicious yellow squash soup and a sandwich.

With a few stops here and there we did this loop in a mere six hours. We thought we'd be only a couple hours but got back just in time to go to the

little theater in town for a musical production of The Secret Garden. It was great and brought tears to my eyes. Sam, and most of the guys there, probably could have done without it.

It's a little difficult to understand the words when it's all singing But he's a good sport and enjoyed the popcorn.

The next morning we moved on. In order to get from West Yellowstone to Cody or Casper we crossed through the Park again on part of the southern loop to the east gate.

In cool weather many areas of the ground here continuously send spurts of steam up. This morning was very cool and fields were covered with swirls of steam. Here and there were larger geysers and even the creek seemed to be hot water. Old Faithful is nearby. I'm thrilled to report this end of the park has greatly recovered since we saw it five years ago. .

We're about done with sightseeing as we aim for our last two destinations , The Arch in Saint Louis and The Harley Davidson assembly plant. Sam's excited. We stayed two nights in an Eagles parking lot in Leavenworth, where the military prison is. Actually there are seven confinement installations around here. I guess they ship all the bad boys and girls from everywhere to this area.

The Harley plant is just across the river in Missouri. Sam toured it and thoroughly enjoyed watching the robotics in action and seeing how these bikes are put together. Finally, he feels fulfilled. He loves anything mechanical and wants to know how everything works.

Well, let me tell you, during these past few days he's had a chance to put this love of mechanics to work figuring out a few things here in the rig. We kept having these niggling little problems and he kept tinkering with them. For example, one of the leveling jacks hasn't been going all the way up each time and lately he's had to help it by hand. Then I began hearing a very quiet beeping every time we shut the engine off. It was so high pitched

and faint that he never heard it but it bugged the heck out of me. An incessant beep coming from up above the dash at the far left. It would quit after about half an hour but would start up again the next time we turned the engine off. In his searching for this problem he realized another one… we were draining the engine battery by leaving a little inverter in the cigarette lighter when the engine was off. So we soon had a dead battery there. But then our auxiliary starter wouldn't start the engine either. Just now he found a blown fuse in that starter. Are you following this? He's in his glory! But the beeping continued.

He began routing around high up in a front cabinet on the drivers side. He found a tiny control panel there he was not aware of. He touched a switch and Viola! The beeping stopped! It turned out that the automatic awning switch in there had been moved a tiny bit toward the on position. Who knew? So finally everything is up and running and not beeping. Phew. .

We're going to St. Louis for the last tour of this trip. we plan to go up in that arch. Upon Arriving, we realized this is a different type of city than any we've ever visited before. . Driving through the downtown area between very old, tall stone buildings was a surprise to me. I guess after hanging around in so many old western towns, I expected another one here. We visited Laclede Landing and had lunch at Big Daddy's. This part of the city is the original town near the river. Built by a Frenchman named LaClede, It still had the old cobblestone streets and is now loaded with restaurants and shops.

We DID the Arch. What a strange experience. First you walk down to the underground beneath the two bases of the arch and find museums, a theater. Food and stores. You get in line and go down deeper to a little area where everyone is divided into groups of five. Each group is positioned in front of a four and a half foot high door. When our tram comes we squeeze into this little rounded capsule and sit in a semi circle with our knees touching each other. The door closes…Our little capsule jiggles and twitches and begins to move upward and sideways as it climbs the arch. You could see out just enough to see a little ladder on the wall of the shaft you are rising up in. Not too encouraging. The ride was four minutes to the top where we all climbed out and went up more tiny steps to the uppermost floor where we could look out of long horizontal windows. Out one side we could

see down to the town and on the other side was the river. After a few minutes we crawled back into the capsule for the three minute return trip. Wow. What an amazing engineering feat!

Saturday, another 300 miles east across the country and we parked at Wally World in Nashville. It was rainy and messy out so we scratched plans of music row and settled down to finish our book. We were at a crucial point and wanted to see how the bad guy got his just desserts. Love that Sandra Brown. After we finished it Sam went into the store for something.

It was pitch dark out. I began hearing sirens in the distance… getting louder and louder now. Lights began flashing in our parking lot and all around our rig! The sirens were right here! now they seemed to come right up to our rig and circle around it! I locked the door! It was weird and scary. At least I knew I wasn't on fire.

Sam suddenly appeared and asked me what I'd done. We decided something was going on at the I HOP nearby and boy, did they send out the troops! Never fount out what it was all about but what an exciting end to July.

2009 August. Dollywood, Elkmont.

Our trip is winding down with just a few more highlights. Heading toward Knoxville, Tennessee we found our way to the Tenneco Village boat ramp shortly after noon. We'd been looking forward to visiting our friends, Karen and Ken, for nearly three years and finally we're all in the same place at the same time. Knowing we couldn't park the rig in their hilly neighborhood, they suggested we leave it in the lot at the boat ramp. To our surprise, they picked us up in a boat! We toured the beautiful lake surrounded by hills and mountains and met some of their friends having a party in the water. We went on to the clubhouse and had lunch on the deck. Afterward we rode all thru the village and finally to their new house. Let me tell you their 'little log cabin up in the Tennessee hills' is anything but that. All the stone and wood work, the high ceilings and the several floor levels built into the hillside were gorgeous. We were duly impressed. We thought they were going to down

size from their Florida home but I think they doubled instead. Funny how that happens. But their village and all the amenities are lovely. It was fun to see them again and we'll continue to keep in touch.

We drove to our reservation in Elkmont Campground. That winding road is harrowing because the rocky mountainside right next to it often juts out quite far into our lane. It could gouge the top half of the rig if we didn't move each time we saw one of those outcroppings. And of course cars were coming at us from around the curves. But we made it!

We settled in, put out a couple chairs and just sat listening to the river rushing past. Perfect. I've always wanted to see Dollywood and finally, here we are.

We arrived at 10am just as it was opening. I loved that the shops and restaurants were little country homes with lots of white trim and little fences. And of course tons of flowers everywhere. Very, very pretty. One evening we went to the Comedy Barn and laughed for two hours. We had a milk shake with two straws at the Happy Days Diner for supper. We stopped at 'the back porch' where Dolly's uncle Bill Owens was playing with Two of her cousins. They stress that they're FIRST cousins because, I think, that makes a difference in Tennessee. The show was fun and entertaining. I'm not sure the whole thing was worth 50 bucks each for us, but then, we didn't take advantage of most of it. They should have special tickets for old farts who just want to wander around looking and resting.

We had no plans for our last day of this trip. We could hang around this campground like this forever. It's cool and comfortable here in the trees with Spaghetti simmering on the stove and Sam outdoors with a book and a beer. I'm here with all my notes, reading and reminiscing , vaguely aware of our neighbor campers. A young couple have a screen porch type tent erected and she has everything set up in there for dinner while he's busy at the grill nearby. An older couple just arrived for the cook out. Suddenly, I mean very suddenly, it was dark out! Sam dashed inside narrowly avoiding huge raindrops. We watched as our neighbor's fire got doused. Their food is set up in that screen room tent. They all huddled inside it. The rain came down harder and harder. No guy wires hold it up. The top filled with rain and finally it crashed down on everyone. Oh geez. I hope that young guy wasn't trying to impress a new boss! or, worse yet, new in laws!!

We were up and out early for the last leg of our journey. Over the mountain, through Cherokee and Hiawassee and into Blairsville where we had lunch with Pat and Art. Then 35 more miles over Blood Mountain and down into our little haven, Paradise Valley.

Hello to everyone! Great to see familiar faces and catch up on news that really matters.

We were out 10 weeks and went 6,915 miles. It was wonderful. I wish everyone had such an opportunity to see this great country. Would we do it again?? Oh, You Bet!

It's so good to be home. Everyone's waving and glad to see us. It didn't take long to settle in. Then we walked over to June and Sid's to pick up our mail and tell them all about everything. Nan & Bob will be here soon. The pool's had a major facelift and is clean and sparkly. We already used it once. John & Mary had us over for doughnuts and bagels And one evening we went to Linda & Duayne's for drinks

As I sit here at my computer going over all these notes from our trip, everything is peaceful and quiet; a nice drizzly rain pattering on the roof with little drops dripping on my arm...

What?!! Drops on my arm?! Sam! Help!

One day after breakfast at the clubhouse we took a Harley ride to the Apple Capital, Ellijay. We went for a piece of apple pie and brought back peaches and apples and promised to return for the festival next month. that evening we had a Steven Foster sing along at the clubhouse. All went along pretty well until Sam and I brought out our kazoos! We sat in a circle reading the words of songs as it played on the system. Then Sam's feet started twitching and soon he jumped up and jitter bopped across the floor, Round in a circle and plopped back down in his chair. It was Too funny! Soon everyone was bopping and twisting And as a last straw, Sam brought out

his farmer john wax teeth and tried to kiss Margaret and Rose. They screeched and squealed! They're each over 90 and they loved it. what fun.

Today Sam busied himself making a holder for drink glasses. I'd become proficient at knocking full glasses and, heaven forbid-a beer bottle- right off the table. Now we set a glass or a bottle into this framework and it won't tip over unless you throw it at someone! This should save on glassware, nerves and tempers. We call them simply Glass Caddies.

Lately we have bears roaming around our park. There've been several sightings, usually around dusk. One kept getting at the birdseed on the deck at someone's cabin. Tonight one dashed up between our neighbors place and ours carrying a bag of something in its mouth. On up through our property it ran with his treasure swinging back and forth as he galloped away. I guess I won't be sitting outside after dark anymore. Usually the mosquitoes chase us in, anyway, but it's turned cooler lately so those pesky little pests will soon disappear. But now we have to worry about bears?!

There's some color in the leaves as we've had plenty of rain. Maybe it'll be a pretty fall with cooler mornings and evenings. Sam's already had a couple fires in the pit.

We discovered something funny about our rig recently. The awning operates with a touch of a button. We use it often as we can't leave it out during high winds. And we open it up and let it dry out after a good rain. The button's right at the door so we usually stand on the step , press it and watch overhead as it opens up. Well, you might catch a ton of water in your face! So after two years with this rig it dawns on someone that if we lift the front of the rig on its levelers a wee bit, this water will always run off the rear of the bus. Daah. Are we quick or what?

We had a nice ride to Highlands, N.C. with Dave & Judy. We enjoy them. They have a scooter which seems to be a popular thing these days. They get along so well and are fun to be with. And by the way, they're a success story of a couple who met on line several years ago.

When Nancy & Bob got back from Ohio we had spaghetti and salad ready for them. It had been a hard trip up and a hard trip back. A tire blew out so they had an extra long way to go that last day. They got in around 7 pm and came over a little later for supper. Nan was a basket case. It was harrowing. Too many roads with the winding curves and sharp inclines and steep declines. Bob no longer drives and this was nearly too much for her. She was scared to death about the brakes. She'd called us earlier to say they'd be much later as she had to cool the brakes down. That's when Sam realized she was still using first gear incorrectly, riding the brake way too much. He got on the phone and told her how to shift into a low gear while going under 30 mph. Then let the motor roar as the transmission holds the speed down. Finally she tried it and let the motor roar. She always thought it was tearing something up while it actually was just doing its job.

As usual, it was good to see them. We've missed each other the whole summer. Now we'll have nearly two months together.

The last days of September were Bright and cool with Colorful leaves covering the ground. We'd had about ten days of hard rain earlier this month and the lakes are nearly normal again. It'll be a pretty autumn.

We went to the festivities at Octoberfest one Sunday and enjoyed the comic relief. And we rode to Blue Ridge with Judy & Dave for an apple fritter.

Sam and I got out of the stock market this month and went into a GMIB. That's a Guaranteed Minimum Income Benefit. This is a safe way to store money with a constant 5% growth guaranteed, and all the while drawing out 5% to live on. It's great not worrying about the market.

2009 October. No more talk of droughts for us. At one point we had over five inches in one rainfall. No damage reported but it was pretty scary for some folks. Atlanta had major flooding with many people moved to shelters. Even Six Flags Over Georgia was flooded out. Every day for the past several weeks is cloudy, misty or actually rainy. An unusual season . Our friend, Ed, is renting a cabin

by the creek with their dog Pepper. Sharon stayed in Fla to work. He's a fun character and luckily has a sunny disposition. He stops by our place quite often and we sit at the picnic table chatting. With all this rain many of us have been having water problems with our rigs. It seems Sam's calking

every nook and cranny of the entire outside of the rig. But poor Ed has one problem after another. One day His washer backed up. Another time he left the sink filling while he went outside, forgetting all about it. Oops. His fridge leaked all over the place a couple weeks ago and still doesn't work. Along with a couple other fiascos, he's constantly using the wet vac on something. Sam says he'd be climbing the walls.

We rode the bike to the Woody Gap festival one day. No rain, Yippee! On the way back we stopped at Pappy's and were looking at all the wood swings and gliders and chairs they had. We're thinking of making an area in the yard for relaxing and visiting with neighbors. I'd like to border it with split rail fencing and plants and flowers to create a little privacy. I'd really love to have a nice swing that seats 2 or 3 people. Maybe next year we'll look around for one .

One evening we went to dinner and a play with Nan & Bob. Plaza Suite was a hoot and our local group was terrific. Later our Italian dinner was scrumptious. A mahvelous good time.

That Sunday seemed nice enough to take a chance on the weather so we picked Nan & Bob up and rode to Ellijay for the apple festival. She's been wanting to go to that one for years. A great day and it actually got sunny and warmed up. We each brought home pies and fruit.

The other evening, during a break in the drizzles, Sam & I took a chance and went for a walk around our block. We stopped and met some new neighbors as they were moving in. Carol and Gary were just across the green space from us. They were just getting settled and their biggest problem was a huge swing sitting there in the way. They were looking for someone to take it to the dump! We couldn't believe it! This was exactly what we were looking for! And they want it gone! WOW.

The next morning four guys toted it across that greenspace to our yard . A little paint and a new cushion and its perfect. we love it. Thanks Carol & Gary, and our G A for inducing us to go for a walk at just the right time. .

The next day was PVC's last hurrah for the year. our big pre Thanksgiving turkey dinner was held at the clubhouse due to rain. Then we left TCF early. Happy Halloween!

2009 November. Welcome back to Florida! Our little place in the world is neat. Lots of trees and sunshine. The house is comfortable and I love everything we've done to it: the kitchen, the front room, the floors and the new porch are great.

Quickie notes: my son, 43, had a melanoma removed from the back of his neck and I hope we never hear from it again. (16 years later all is good so far.)

Sam was excited about getting a new motorcycle. But then decided instead to get some work done on the old one and get new chrome stuff. It's like brand new! Wonderful!

We camped a few days at Disney world experimenting with some of the latest amusements; In an imaginary plane we did fantastic barrel rolls, spiral dives and a loop de loop or two .

In a ride called Soaring we sat in a seat with our feet dangling while our chair soared up thru all sorts of places . The wind blew at us and we felt the movement and thrill of nearly touching the ocean with our feet, of having a jet plane narrowly miss us, of flying over the Golden Gate Bridge and thru Yosemite State Park. It was thrilling. So realistic! A wonderful ride! We did the Country Bear Jamboree, heard Obama speak in the Hall of Presidents, and spent half an hour on Tom Sawyer's Island. Thunder Mountain was fun, Sam made everyone laugh with his daring when we began to slow down approaching the end of the ride and he bravely threw both arms up in the air! Hilarious. This was my first time in that big sphere at the entrance. I didn't know it was actually an amusement to be enjoyed, I thought it was a landmark of sorts. We had dinner that evening in the Settlement: Trails End restaurant. As usual, we had a great time together. Sam is truly a wonder.

Home in Gainesville, Kim and the kids came by for spaghetti dinner and we all went to The Hippodrome for a hilarious play: A Tuna Christmas! Two guys portray twelve people. especially good at being women. Very, very funny!

One evening we rode with Linda & Ron to the Steven Foster State Park to experience the Christmas lights. Millions of lights covered every tree trunk and fixture! The big bell tower and all the little craft shops were lit. It was cold, Christmassy and fun. Later at their house we sat around an outdoor fire drinking loaded hot chocolate, laughing and giggling for an hour or so. We always have a good time together.

Christmas day we had dinner for eight and The last week slipped by. And just like that,2009 was history.

2010 January. Florida was just plain Cold! We huddled indoors reading, cooking, and working on our computers. We went to the movies and the theater and Time passed. Finally, a nice Day. We took advantage of it by going to Ebor City for a real Cuban meal. This delighted Sam no end. Then on to the big RV show at the fairgrounds in Tampa. We ran into 10 different folks we knew from Georgia. Like old home week. It was fun wandering thru the new rigs. Still nothing to take the place of our Georgia Boy though.

One day we had lunch at Frog's Landing on Cedar Key. I miss those little outdoor seafood restaurants on the water like we had around Sarasota. Cedar Key reminds me of those places. We rode around the residential area and were surprised to learn of the historic value of this tiny key. Around 1855 Cedar Key was discovered by a pencil maker from Germany. Cedar is non splintering and makes the best pencils. This family cut and shipped this wood to Germany and later to New York when they moved their business there. They shipped slate from here which was used for the lead in the pencils. These are the familiar yellow ever hard Favor pencils we grew up with. How in the world did they find this tiny place?

At Chopsticks with Don and Pat, we all tried Pad Thai for the first time. Sam loved it with very thinly sliced steak while I had it with shrimp. It was so good we went back a week later. And we've enjoyed it many times since.

2010 February. The 14th, Valentines Day. Sam ordered roses for me, assuming they'd be delivered that afternoon in a beautiful vase. When they hadn't arrived by 5 PM he cancelled an engagement we had and we got involved in a TV movie. UPS finally arrived with a box. A Box? Flowers in a box?! Sam was disappointed but such is the way of things these days.

But here were a dozen perfect long stem roses with buds. They were cold and wet, waiting to be placed in the beautiful accompanying vase. 24 hours later they were in full bloom and truly gorgeous. We enjoyed them for two

weeks. Meanwhile, I had a box of candy for Sam and I gave him the whole thing. What's remarkable about that? You ask… Well, let me tell you:

At Christmastime he bought me a lovely box of candy. With so much food around at the time, I didn't get into it just then. But when I finally asked him to pass it to me one evening, there were just two pieces left! I told friends I was going to give him a box for Valentine's day with only two pieces in it. When I told him he was lucky to get a full box, he just laughed. BTW, he shared this one with me.

Here's another funny incident:

Sam is always up much earlier than I, with the TV and his computer going in the front room. Usually he closes the bedroom door so I can sleep. When I wake up I might phone him in the next room and he answers with 'room service'. I might ask if Juan Valdez is on duty that morning… And soon a cuppa coffee appears on my nightstand. (For the unaware, this was a play on a current line of coffee commercials on Tv.)

But one morning he came into the room very early and very quietly for something. Just as I was about to say something to him, I heard the click of the bedroom door closing and assumed he'd already left the room. Knowing with the TV on out there he'd never hear me say something from the bed so I yelled as loud and long as I could, "HEY!!"

Instantly I heard hangers flying in the closet as he fell over everything in there. He was barely ten feet from the bed and Had nearly jumped out of his skin. I laughed hysterically. It turned out the folding closet door had pushed the bedroom door and I'd heard it click shut. We still laugh every time we think of this.

It's going to be cold and blustery around here for another month or so. Luckily we both like to read and we spend a lot of time on the computers. We did the usual lunches and shopping.

After much snow followed by tons of rain and flooding, we finally had some decent days. Riding the Harley early one morning was wonderful. I smelled all sorts of flowers, newly mowed grass, burning wood and fresh air as we rode in the country to meet Judy & Dave at a rustic little place called Three

Bananas. On the way back we stopped at a salvage yard and picked up a headlight for Kim's car. She had inadvertently driven her car into a hedge… 3 or 4 times! She thought she was on the brake, she kept jamming that pedal as the car crunched deeper and deeper into that hedge. Thank God it was a hedge and not the lake behind it!

One day we took off for Alabama to visit Nancy & Bob. Finally we saw their place and met the neighbors we'd been hearing about. We walked along the beautiful, huge gulf beach where guys were busy catching pompano. Their property is similar to the one they have at PVC; same shape but bigger. We stayed in their guest house, an elaborate shed with very nice sleeping accommodations.

Driving home later we took the coastal road thru all the little towns along the water. It took four hours to drive a hundred miles from Pensacola to Panama City, including lunch and a couple other stops along the way. The weather was perfect.

A bit of scary news: an oil well rig in the gulf blew up recently . Eleven people were killed as the whole rig sank about a mile down to the bottom

oil gushed out of the ocean floor at the rate of over 200,000 gallons a day and they don't know how long it will take to plug it up. They, whoever they are, are not even sure if it can be done! Already lots of dead sea life has come to shore. This is a huge disaster.

After a cold winter in north central Florida, we're back in Georgia for the summer, getting things set up. WE brought our tomato plants and hopefully we'll get to have some of them before the birds and bugs do. the green peppers are coming along well.

We sanded and painted the big wooden swing our neighbors gave us last year. It's under a tree at the edge of the yard with chairs and potted flowers nearby. Sam moved the fire ring to that area making it cozy and inviting.

We've had a couple short rides on the bike, each ending up in Helen for lunch. Nan's son , Ron, and his family were here and we had a big cookout

at the pool. Good food, fun and swimming. In Dahlonega we saw “Grease,” PUT ON entirely by teens. All the cast, dancers and singers were teens And they did a fabulous job. Then we hit Captain Dee’s for dinner. Another fun time.

Sam held a class about cell phones one day at the pavilion. Folks were so happy to learn about their phones. It ran over two hours and now they want a class in computers ! Hoo boy.

Dave & Judy rode with us to Highlands. The early morning ride was beautiful: cool and shady along the winding back roads. It was so chilly up there we put heavier shirts on as we browsed around. Coming back though was extremely Hot. We came back via a more direct route, meaning highways instead of back roads. No shade. It took forever to get home and I thought you could fry an egg on our helmets by then. We did 130 miles that day. Then, after a tall glass of iced tea, we all jumped into the pool for the ultimate cooldown.

Another afternoon we went to the International Café in Helen with Nan & bob for dinner. On the way, we stopped at a new store along the way called “Goats on the Roof”. They had Amish goods from groceries and ice cream cones to clothing and furniture. An interesting place.

Eventually we arrived at the Café where The Wiener schnitzel was delicious. We Followed it with strawberry shortcake at Nan’s, ending another fun day in Paradise.

2010 July. A few days later while riding with Dave & Judy we stopped at Sleepy Hollow. This is an adorable place full of whimsical Fairy houses. Some very tiny like birdfeeders and some big enough for children to play in. each is a little quirky, all bright and colorful, and slightly askew with cockeyed roofs and inhabited by gnomes. We bought a colorful tiny door, about 6 inches tall, and two little gnome people who use it. Sam attached the door to the bottom of the tree next to the road in front of our property.

He made a little walkway up to it and tiny people are working outside. They've already taken up residence here. adorable.

Wine is huge around here. Each winery has magnificent buildings high on a mountain with gorgeous views and lovely rooms for tastings and weddings. One day Nan & I went with a group of ladies to Montelukast Winery for lunch. The wine was delicious and our BLT's were made with fried green tomatoes! It was fun being out with such a nice gaggle of women.

Last week Sam and I took off on our own for a three day bike trip to the Asheville area. We passed Franklyn, thru Sylva and onto the Blue Ridge Parkway for another 40 miles. A beautiful ride with practically no other traffic. We exited the parkway in Asheville onto a two lane road that wound back down the mountainside. This was a narrow, bumpy road completely hidden under a tree canopy. With sharp turns and no guardrails, it was Quite exhilarating and oh, so beautiful.

After a bit of lunch at Fatz we ventured on to see some of the Vanderbilt Village. We'd never been here before; it was well worth the effort. This village was established for the workers when the Manse was being erected. Several blocks of wonderful big homes were built. These homes, now well over a hundred years old, are restaurants and lovely stores. The streets and sidewalks are cobblestone and brick, accented with elegant old street lamps. We wandered into one store called "A New Morning", and spent a couple hours looking at all the fascinating things they had. These are not your normal tee shirt shacks. This one went on from room to room, upstairs and down, with art work, glass works, interesting and pretty pottery, and even furniture of colorful inlay wood designs. Suddenly we realized it was 6:30 and the store was supposed to close at 6! We scooted out of there with intensions of returning the next day.

But that morning Sam suggested we go see a hotel I've been nagging him about for years. I wanted him to see it. Then we could get on with other things. It was The Grove Park Inn!!

This establishment opened in 1913, just north of Asheville on a mountain top in the Smokies. Needless to say, Sam was duly impressed. We spent a couple hours wandering around, learning about its construction and talking with employees. I remembered the massive fireplaces at each end of the main room. I was there over 40 years ago with Big Curt for an Amway Convention and wanted to confirm in my mind that everything is really as impressive as I remember. they definitely are. Each fireplace holds 12 foot long logs. Sam and I stood IN one of them for a photo. A very sweet employee we chatted with gave us a lovely book about it which we realized later sold for 34 dollars in the gift shop. What a nice gift! And I'm finally satisfied that this place is as magnificent as I remembered.

A must see if ever you're in the area. The Grove Park Inn.

Next, on the Blue Ridge Parkway we stopped at a museum of folk art to browse a while. Lunch was a Grouper Reuben. Something new, and it was deelish.

The next day as we started home We headed back up that little road that winds up Mount Pisgah. This time we turned up the path to visit the Pisgah View Ranch for a few minutes. This is another place I'd visited eons ago and wanted to share with Sam. Kathi and I spent several days at this dude ranch in the eighties and had such a great time. It still looks like a good vacation place. We continued up the mountain and soon stopped to put on more clothes. We donned rain jackets over several shirts and still felt the chill. But it was fun.

We stopped in Sylva to browse and in Dillsboro for lunch. Near Franklyn we drove into a new RV park that was advertised for miles along the highway. What a bust. Their claim to fame is " The wonderful view you get of the surrounding mountains. Nothing obstructs your view". Consequently there's not a tree in sight. You just bake on a hillside in perfect sunlight. Yuck! We rode 170 miles that day and it was great to pull into our nice SHADY site here at PVC .

Two days later Kim arrived for a visit. The boys are busy getting ready for school and ROTC and whatever, so she came up on her own. We've been shopping at the outlet mall: New skirts and work out clothes for Kim ,

sweaters and tops for me, shoes for each of us, and a pressure washer and table saw for Sam.

We talked to Laura on Skype for the first time the other day. How cool is that ! Talking and seeing her on the computer. We were able to show her our new togs right then

Some guys asked Sam to help get a motorcycle club started in our park. So we wrote an introductory letter For each cycle owner announcing a meeting next week

In early September we had our first Mountain Cruiser ride featuring six bikes: one scooter, two trikes and three cycles. we rode toward Blue Ridge to a great place called the Toccoa Riverside Restaurant. It was new to everyone and we enjoyed the food, the service, and the setting on a deck above the river. A nice ride with new friends. All arrived safely and had lunch. Then some went on to Blue Ridge and some came back to PVC for r & r. Sam did a great job preparing for this ride and everyone appreciated it. What a fun way to get to know our neighbors!

Next: Savannah AND Charleston.

We head out with Nan & Bob in our rigs on a long awaited trip using passes we earned by being such wonderful volunteers. Cough. Cough. We were on the road by 9am. Along the way I made a note of a Lodge Cast Iron store in Commerce, about 45 miles from home. We should stop here on the way back and get a lid for one of Sam's pots. Little did I know how much time we'd have for that bit of browsing…

Five miles later Bob radioed us. They had hot brakes again. We all pulled off and soon realized our first night out would be in Dink's repair shop. Shades of two years ago when we vacationed in Buford, Georgia at a repair shop. C'mon now. Let's not make this a habit!

we found several items at the Lodge store we didn't know we needed. We grabbed a quick meal nearby and finally crashed in our rigs. Their rig was up on jacks with no rear wheels, but they were able to sleep in it. About 10

minutes into a good snooze there was a tremendously loud triple blast from a train as it passed right next to us. We peeled ourselves off the ceiling and soon fell asleep again. What fun.

We made it to Skid Away State Park in Savannah the next day. wow. It's gorgeous here. After settling in we had a glass of wine, dinner together and made plans. First we did the Old Town Tour learning all sorts of historic facts.

the inside of the huge Episcopal Cathedral brought back memories of my smaller Saint Mary's Church in Warren. Later we walked in and out of shops along the riverfront, looking for the perfect place to have lunch. We finally decided on Huey's where we had sandwiches on muffalettas. They were different, for sure. Nan's was fried green tomatoes with green and black olives, other veggies and some sauce, all warmed up in a bun. I had turkey with all kinds of stuff in that same kind of sauce and bun. We ate them, but looked at each other questioningly. Probably should have ordered clam chowder.

We drove to the Mercer home and walked in one of the pretty parks a bit. I wanted us to experience this before we left the area. These parks are so pretty and calming. It feels wonderful just strolling the pathways under these ancient trees with the Spanish moss flowing in the breeze. Old benches sit here and there welcoming you to sit a spell. And in the center is a statue of a city forefather.

The next day we met with Sam's sister and her hubby, Rita & Jim. We caught a Greyline tour of Charleston, the Holy City. There must be a church on every block And everything is several hundred years old. If it's newer, it was built to look old.

. We browsed in the Market Place where we each found some treasures. I bought a sweetgrass basket that the Gullah women make. Usually they put their name on the bottom. This one was made by " Boston", Male or Female? I dunno .

Saturday, back in Savannah. While a thunderstorm raged on we converged at Nan's where she had a London broil with steamed carrots and potatoes on

the grill, lima beans in fatback, Tony seasoning and salad. Yum. We each had two helpings.

The Wormsloe Historic Site is nearby at the isle of Hope. This settlement began around 1730 by a man named Noble Jones. The drive to this facility is a mile long with gorgeous huge trees lining the entire way. This particular drive was used in the film Gone with The Wind as the approach to Terra. After cramming our little grey cells we head into town for more history. We came to the diner, Clairie's, which was featured in the book The Garden of Good and Evil. A fun place full of college kids. We browsed thru the shops at the top of the hill along the river. These are the second and third floors of the buildings we browsed the other day down on the riverfront. These upper stores were full of really nice things like Antiques, Unique umbrellas, and local books. Exhausted, we rode back to our comfy rigs where we crashed with full tummies and tired bodies. In the morning we'd head back to PVC.

After an uneventful 8 hour ride, it was great to get here and find Fall had arrived. It was cool and our properties were covered with leaves. We'd enjoyed our visit to the low country but it was great to get back to the mountains.

One day a group of us rode the bikes to Mercier's, the apple store, where we had sandwiches and hot fried pies for lunch. We started out in jackets and came back in tee shirts and sun screen. Still pretty warm around here. We decided to have weekly rides with the group so by the end of the month had several outings under our belts.

Then one day… Brrr! Drop is here! As Dennis the Menace proclaimed, when the leaves drop off the trees And it's cold out! The next day we froze our toes and our nose and our tushes!

We've had some good rides with our Mountain Cruisers. It's great everyone gets along so well and we have nice meals together. One weekend Rita and Jim rented a park model in our campground along with their daughter and hubby, Tina and Mike. That evening Sam did his rainbow trout fry over the fire followed by s'mores, and accompanied by guitar music by our neighbor Carol. Then we got out the harmonicas and kazoos. Nan & Bob came by with Penny and she howled right along with everyone. What a happy racket!

Our yearly pre Thanksgiving dinner was at the clubhouse this year. We had three turkeys: fried, baked, and trash canned! Rita and I made sweet potato casserole and mashed potatoes with gravy. Over seventy people attended and there was a ton of food.

It was especially nice Afterward, when everyone seemed content to just sit a spell and chat.

Later, in Helen, a bunch of us joined the throngs in the crazy Saturday night festivities. We browsed the town in search of souvenirs for families and friends. It was dark and chilly and alive with people. All the buildings were sparkling with thousands of tiny lights, the fountains were gurgling, horses were plodding along with their carriages, and music came from everywhere. It was exhilarating! October in the mountains!

And I can't believe all my flowers in their pots are still so pretty.

The next week we prepared to leave with thoughts of returning here later to experience some winter weather. . We left the motor home as it was, the slides out and not winterized. We plan to come back to see all the pretty Christmas decorations.

2010 November. We drove home to our bungalow in the Florida forest, happy as clams. All were fine, friends were friendly and neighbors, neighborly. glad to have us back.

Then the weather turned cold and yikes… We had no heat. Our 26ear old furnace quit. One day I'll have to bite the bullet and get a new unit. But, for now, our innovative repairman brought something out of his storage shed and got us up and running.

But what's going on with the rig in Georgia?

Sam was watching the weather up there and it looked like they were in for a 3 or 4 day freeze. So, back in the car we went. . Slept in the rig one night

and drove it back to Florida. That's how we happened to have it handy and were able to spend some time during the holidays camping in Saint Augustine that winter.

Thanksgiving at Kim's was nice and the meal delicious. The boys were great, helpful and fun. Kim AND I assembled their artificial tree. It came in a box with one long pole and many different lengths of branches, eventually creating a lovely tree. At our house our little tree on the credenza with sparkling poinsettias and lights in an arc on the wall behind it is enough décor. My gift to Kim; cleaning her house with her. One day the top of the kitchen cabinets with all those bottles and lights : You know-the dust collectors. An area you never want to attack. Another day we cleaned Alex's and the family rooms. That's it for me. As a reward, we went to a program at the Gainesville playhouse. A musical called GI Holiday Juke Box was full of World War II songs like a U S O tour group would do. good fun.

It's not even winter yet and we're breaking all records with this cold! We're running all the heaters in the rig to keep things from freezing. So we're going to use it. We took off for St. Augustine for a few days at Anastacia State Park. Since we'll be looking at Christmas lights we should wear hats, coats, gloves and scarves. A taste of winter without going north. On our first evening we went to a restaurant called Caps. What a wonderful place. From our table we looked out through an entire wall of glass onto the water and a gorgeous sunset. We each ordered a fish called trigger, prepared two different ways and with tiny peeled and perfectly marinated tomatoes. I even had yummy hot buttered rum. tasted like Christmas.

The next day we rode the sightseeing train, lunched at the Columbia Restaurant and toured the San Sebastian Winery. We learned of an old lighthouse who's very old Fresnel light was shot out by a 14 year old kid with a high powered rifle. It was antique and the repair on it couldn't be exact. That kid is in prison these days for who knows what.

After dinner at Scarlet O'Hara's, we rode around viewing the holiday lights, especially at Governors Square. Got back to the rig and settled down. Tomorrow we'll - home again.

Christmas was at Linda & Ron's , and the next day dinner here exchanging cards in lieu of gifts. Two days later the holiday stuff was in the attic!

2011 January. Gainesville Florida. TCF

The nation, in fact the world, is having a rough time weatherwise. Lots of snow, rain, and flooding. We stay home, dry and cozy. Sam's doing more cell phone classes here in TCF and I'm still writing book reviews for the Gobbler.

I tried for days to reach Curtiss but to no avail. Finally it rang through but with a weird ring like they have in Europe. Later I learned He and Haley actually were in England and Ireland but He hadn't told me because I'm such a worry wart. They had a nice trip on behalf of a good friend who needed to do some business over there. Good for them.

We rode to Mount Dora to see my good friend and roller skating partner of our youth, Donna, and her hubby Dave. Haven't seen them in years and Sam hadn't met them as yet. It was wonderful to reconnect. They're doing well; healthy and happy following their dreams working at Disney World and loving it.

After a month of wet and miserable weather, today was great. A beautiful day. We couldn't wait to get out on the bike! What a relief to be outdoors for a while!

Sam's inventing again. Recently he made a 'Glass Caddy'. This is an attractive wood frame to set your glass or bottle in. It can not be tipped over. Great idea for us who never see that beer bottle or glass as we swipe the table clean. They tend to go flying.

Next he built a similar holder for Kleenex type boxes that make it easy to extract those last few tissues that are so difficult. You simply turn the box over in the holder so the opening is on a slanted, slightly downward facing side, pull down instead of up, and out slides the next hanky! No more digging into the box for those last ones. Pretty cool, huh? He needs to patent these ideas.

I went through two nights wired up being tested for sleep apnea at the sleep Disorder Center. I used two different types of masks and ultimately was deemed a good candidate for this remedy. But honestly, does anyone ever go home without qualifying?

I used the apparatus for several months but felt no relief to any of my complaints. It was so bothersome to sleep with it tied to my head though, I felt like an elephant embryo with this pink hose coming out of my face! Finally I turned it back in.

2011 February. Valentine's Day. early that morning I called Sam into the computer room feigning trouble with my computer. Instead he found a big box of chocolates and an adorable card that fit him to a tee. After a hug and a smooch I went off to prepare for a lunch ride we had planned to Saint Augustine. A few minutes later he called in to me, "Gail, where did you get that candy?" I called back something about Publix. .

Then I heard doors and drawers banging from the hallway and the front room and figured he was getting his leather jacket and other accoutrements he might need for the ride. Suddenly he came bustling into the bedroom and went directly to my side of the bed rattling plastic and cellophane,

catching my attention, of course. Turns out he had a nice musical card for me and the exact same kind of candy box as I'd given him! We laughed and continued to get ready for our ride.

Sitting on the deck of The Conch House in Saint Augustine a couple hours later enjoying the sun and good food, I asked him why he questioned me about where I got the box of candy. Well, he says… I bought you a box several days ago and hid it in the chest of drawers in the computer room. Later I decided you might find it there so I moved it to another location.

And so? I prompt.

Well, when I went to get it for you in the chest of drawers it wasn't there! I looked in every drawer. I couldn't believe you would find it and give it to me like you had just purchased it! But then, you had been with Laura the previous day and I wondered if maybe you both thought it would be a good joke. "What?!" I laughed, shocked at the very idea. He continued on… "Then I remembered I'd moved it but couldn't remember where! I'd finally found a safe place. By now we are nearly in hysterics. So where did you find it? I asked.

In the credenza behind the mini vac, right where I'd put it. he chortled.

We laughed our way through lunch and had a lovely ride home in the afternoon sun.

I can only say, life is going to get more and more interesting as the

years go by And our memories go BYE bye!

2011 March . In an effort to hold down the heat and air bills, Sam cut sheets of clear plexiglass to fit each window in our house. A little Velcro holds them in place as they fit behind the blinds and work like a double paned glass. You can't tell they are there but the house is a hundred times more comfortable throughout the year. I kept thinking someday I'd have all the windows replaced but this alleviated that idea. Our electric bill was greatly reduced. He's so clever. Note: 13 years later Plexiglass is still there, invisible, and keeping us cozy and comfortable.

We camped at Hillsborough River in Tampa for a few days. From there we rode the Harley to the Webster flea market everyone talks about. It's a very nice one, and humongous. The weather this week was beautiful, 80degrees during the day and cool at night. Late one afternoon we walked to the river checking out all the bridges along the way. Saw a gator sunning himself across the water from us. This is a pretty path along here. Another day we rode to Brandon where we drove by Nancy & Bob's old house on Breezy Street and then to where Sam lived when his daughter was born some 50 years ago. They'd lived in the same area of Tampa but years apart. From there we rode into Town and drove by each place he'd lived as a child. We had lunch at Ybor City, which is always good, and stopped at Ballast Point along the bay front where we walked out to the end of the pier with ice cream cones. That day I saw lots of Tampa I'd never seen before. Sam says it's deteriorated and is looking very run down. I can certainly vouch from the back of his bike that most of the streets are pretty rough! Actually the whole place seemed derelict and depressed except for Ybor City, which was very nice, and Hyde Park, which is very expensive.

Next we stayed a couple days at Little Manatee River State Park. We met with Art& Pat for lunch at the Anna Maria Oyster Bar. We always enjoy our time with them. The Next morning we were in Sarasota at my lawyer's office taking care of legal stuff. Then off to the Main Bar for another Original Italian Sandwich. Yumm. My mouth waters just thinking about it.

Before the day was done we'd visited with Jane Bertolette, Ken and Caroline Maynard and Liz Cantwell . We enjoyed Siesta Key Beach for a while and finally headed back to the campground, stopping for dinner at the oyster bar again. I was so glad we got to see these people; possibly for the last time ever.

The next morning we left for home. This had been a wonderful interlude.

2011 April. Boys birthdays. We took Alex to dinner at Carrabba's. We all thoroughly enjoyed it. He was pleasant and nice to chat with and I'm glad we did this rather than having a big family dinner. The next week we did the same for young Sam. His choice was Yamato Japanese Restaurant where

the chef cooked in front of us and it was fun watching his flying blades and spatulas. Young Sam totally enjoyed it. I gave each of them a little cash in a money card I had on hand. I wonder if either of them noticed it was a Christmas money card.

Sam and Ron worked on a little patio they wanted at the foot of their porch steps. It was hot and hard work but they got it done. Ron did do some of it earlier , but they had to dee do it and re do it. They'll finish the edges before any rain comes and washes their work away.

2011 May. Hot and Gorgeous. we rode the bike to Cedar Key for lunch and visited THE museum there. Kim came over and we watched another of my favorite movies, Resurrection, starring Ellen Burstyn. It was Wonderful, of course.

Sam went to Mississippi for a few days to attend his granddaughter's kindergarten graduation so I'M batching it… the visit went well and the graduation was cute.

Recently we met neighbors who each have motorcycles, Jim and Pat. We had wine and cheese with them one evening and we went to a concert at Bo Diddly Park another time. Fun times with a nice couple.

Oh no! There's a water leak somewhere in the house ; probably under the slab.

A week later: We've been camping in the house. Guys are crawling around in the attic and digging up the yard. I'm getting new plumbing with pvc pipes in the attic, bypassing the leaking copper system under the concrete. We're living out of jugs of water. Sam tells me this is Not the manner to which he is accustomed. I just remind him to be glad he isn't doing this work himself!

They had to run a pipe through my new cabinets to the kitchen sink and dishwasher; couldn't get it down in the wall in that area. Bummer. Oh well, I wasn't planning on pulling the new cabinets out anytime soon. We're happy with the new piping system. Now we get instant warm, sometimes even hot, water in the bathrooms because the pipes are run thru the attic and it's usually hotter than blazes up there!

They did a few other updates around the house and we're totally pleased.

2011 June. Graduation Day!

How exciting … the kids are all coming in for the big weekend. Alex will graduate high school Saturday and it'll be great to have everyone together for his big occasion. Lots of dinners planned plus a pool party to wind it up on Sunday. It'll be a fun time.

Days later… I'M ready to relax. The week end was a howling success. Everyone got along famously and enjoyed the entire occasion. Big Curt is finally putting forth some effort to get back into Kim's good graces. Up to this point she wasn't interested because she'd tried for years and years to include him in their lives and he was too busy to bother. one evening this week he took her out to dinner and finally they had an agreeable father-daughter talk.

Alex's commencement was wonderful. To our surprise, he SANG A SOLO at the beginning of the performances. It hadn't even been mentioned to us until just minutes beforehand that he would be singing an intro by himself. WHAT?!! Singing?! We were shocked. He was terrific! I had no idea he sang or was in the choir. Kim said it was a recent thing with him, just this last year. No one ever knew he had such a gorgeous voice or even that he liked to sing! He was positively the best of the four soloists!

The actual graduation exercise was fun. A different pocket of people stood and cheered each time a name was called. At Alex's name we all stood and screamed " Maniac, maniac", his online handle.

Sunday we had a cookout at our pool here at TCF. A perfect day of sun, fun and laughter. We were in and out of that water at least four times during the day. Big Curt had made a stew and brought it in a crock pot. We had the heirloom pineapple cheesecake and a big congratulatory cake for Alex. Plus hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, etc. There was no shortage of food and drinks here! At one point Big Curt came and sat with me and we chatted a bit. For some reason he didn't care to go into the pool. Lately he's quite different from his old arrogant self. Something has changed him. I'm happy to see each of the kids finally having a bit of a relationship with him.

The next day everyone met for pizza at Satchel's. Then we girls took Laura to the Jacksonville airport. And soon everyone seemed recuperated; back in their own homes doing their own things. It had been a much needed, healing time for everyone.

Kim and I went to Saint Petersburg bright and early one day to see young Sam as he was graduated from his ROTC Leadership Boot Camp at Admiral Farragut Naval School. She spent the prior night with us and we were up at 5 to get there in time for the ceremony. The cadets did some marching routines and received a braid that's worn over their uniform shoulder. Young Sam looked terrific, tall and confident. He loved the drilling and everything about boot camp training.

My Sam and I cleaned the rig for a little jaunt We'll make next week. We put one of our stressless chairs from home in the RV and drove to Panama City where we were to meet Nancy & bob at Saint Andrew State Park on the beach. However, Bob wasn't well and they didn't make it. We had three days to investigate some new developments in the area. It was horribly hot and our site was only about as wide as the rig. There were kids and traffic up the ying yang! Regardless, we found the new library and we went to an antebellum home and gardens and walked around a bit. We stopped at the brand new Pier Park with All beautiful new construction: fountains, eateries and stores. All done up in multi colors. At Margaritaville I had a

pomegranate margarita on the rocks and we split a huge dish of nachos. It was wonderful. So much for seafood at the beach. We never got there.

Home again. Sam enjoyed using our stress free chair in the rig so he ordered the one we liked in creamy white. They delivered it almost immediately. It'll be terrific in the RV. It's small by some standards but that's good for the rig and fine for us. Also, it has a footstool rather than an automatic rest coming out of it and is therefore a better fit. We love it.

2011 July. I've been getting involved with my memoirs. The more I work on them the deeper into the past I go. The more you write, the more you remember. It's fun! On Sam's birthday we went to the playhouse Theater where we watched "Anything Goes", which was musical and fun. I gave him a card with a couple cycling on a tandem bike wearing sandals, scarves around their necks, backpacks and hats. Otherwise, nude. He laughed so hard he didn't even read the card. Don't forget, we ride a tandem around here!

The next day was weird: First off, Sam brought the mail in and ripped it open. we each received a new credit card from MSSB: Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. He called the appropriate number and activated both of them. Minutes later, while reading the enclosed paperwork he suddenly proclaimed they are charge cards, not replacement FMA debit cards as we had previously. He immediately cut them to smithereens proclaiming we don't want charge cards. In the next breath he read an important notice attached to the paperwork…,.

These new cards replace our current ones. Oh great. He called the number again explaining what he'd done. Now the cards currently in our hands are no good because we activated the new, slaughtered, ones. The guy will send out newer new cards which we'll get in about a week. So for now we have no cards. good grief.

The saga continued for several weeks with no new cards. But in the meantime I had decided I wanted my own account at our local Federal Credit Union. And Sam changed back to his GTE Credit Union. J P Morgan never sent the promised replacement cards anyway.

Next, the dishwasher took a dump. Its lights kept flashing and Sam couldn't get past that to work the washer at all. Then, after replacing the mother board and whatever, he found a schematic for repairmen to refer to, hidden beneath the machine. he studied it and found a possible solution online ; he wiggled something around regarding the water levels and it runs like a champ. We'll see.

2011 August . We're squeezing in a couple months in Georgia before winter sets in. The weather up here is wonderful. I miss Nancy & Bob though. Medically it has been a tough year for them and they're not going to make it at all this summer. Today it's 80 degrees here, a far cry from the hundred degrees in Florida. Sam's already had a couple early morning fires in the pit and he's been out on the bike with Ed. We had a fun ride to Gainesville (Georgia, that is) to do a couple errands. And friends talked me into going to the exercise class here in the clubhouse this morning. Tomorrow the Mountain Cruisers will meet and go to lunch somewhere. Then maybe I'll do the exercise thing again the next day. So things are moving along. Sam and I had a good visit with Mary and John at our picnic table one day. They're such a sweet couple and I'm sad they're selling out. We probably won't ever see them again. All because of the skirmish months ago about Lot lines.

Saturday we, with Ed & Sharon, grabbed a small table and chairs and bug spray and went to the Tallulah Oprey House for a little pickin an grinnin. This is outdoors where there's a great huge fire pit and a covered stage. everyone settles where ever they choose On the grassy knoll. Kids run around DOING SUMMERSALTS AND CARTWHEELS WHILE hot dogs and pastries PROVIDED by the town's ladies ARE BEING SET OUT. They have some great musicians around here. The best part Though, was that Sharon and I chatted all EVENING. We'd never really had much chance to talk together and I found her very friendly and likable. It was a super nice visit.

PVC - Paradise Valley Campground is ABOUT TO UNDERGO some major changes. We're voting on corrections to the covenants and bylaws. They seem like good changes. Also, a decision was made to move the mail boxes from their present location outside our gate and be installed in the pergola within our community. The pergola we built a few years ago will get upgraded with a tin roof and finally every lot will have a mail box . I'm excited about this change. the area will be put to good use.

Everyone's enjoying our Mountain Cruiser excursions. Usually we have a dozen or more folks per ride. Also, it's nice that neighbors like to stop by our place whenever our fire pit is in action. Jackie & Sid came over during their last day here with their 3 big dogs. They had been testing the Poo Plop, Sam's latest invention: no explanation. They were duly impressed.

We were enjoying some Scotch Eggs, along with wine and the fire.

I'm busy keeping up with the Mountain Cruisers paperwork and Sam is busy doing anything anyone needs: lately its fixing gnarly window shades in their rigs. We're Looking forward to the festivals to attend during the next couple months. And Kim's planning a week or so to visit with us so the fun never ceases in Paradise Valley!

2011 September. Yesterday was fun. We took off by bike to investigate a town that was to have country music and food one evening. Thank goodness we check things out before taking a group to a function. Sautee is a cute little town with the neatest little stores. The Village Peddler is just the type store we need in Helen; quality merchandise instead of trinkets and tee shirt shops. We got some nice tees and lovely smelling candles and Sam bought the most beautiful, colorful, knitted hand bag for me. But the place for tonight's concert to be held was disappointing. We'd be out on a blacktop parking lot in total sun. bring chairs-sure, we're on bikes. It looked miserable. We ixnayed the idea.

Then one day some of our group went on a nice chilly ride to Jim's Smokin' Q and on to Sleepy Hollow where we had previously purchased the tiny door that appeared at the foot of a tree in our yard. Sleepy Hollow is adorable, full of Tiny people and houses and everything they need. All scattered here and there outside in the parking lot, in the yard and even inside the store. They're all multi colored crooked little houses and things for Very tiny people who live in them. Just adorable. Today I brought one of these little fairy houses home to put in our garden. Just precious.

Ed and Sharon are staying across the street from us and We often sit by the fire at night yakking and laughing. We certainly do more Socializing up here than in Florida. Our Little Vacation spot… while living a vacation.

Late that September we took off for a little trip on our own. First we crossed Blood Mountain with Ed to have breakfast at The Hole in the Wall in Blairsville. He went back to PV and off we rode to Tellico Plains, Tennessee where we spent some time in a museum. From there we entered the Cherohala Skyway, a scenic road built high on the mountain, similar to the Blue Ridge Parkway. About 50 miles long, it ends up in Robbinsville North Carolina with many overlooks along the way. There's also a cut off down a narrow road along the river. It ends up six miles later at the foot of a very, very high, wonderful waterfall.

We had arranged for a room in Robbinsville at the Microtel Inn for three nights. After a full day riding we settled our stuff into the room and headed out to find food. Oh great. It's Sunday. No one is open on Sunday. All the cute little café's in the world do you no good in the south on Sunday.

In the chill of morning we headed to Bryson City for a ride on the Great Smokey Mountain Railroad. Bryson City is a busy, friendly town and soon we found the Everett Café for a much needed cuppa coffee before this excursion. In the next five hours our trip would take us to the Nantahala Outdoor Center and back. A nice pleasant clickety clacking ride with an hour layover by the river. There we went to Slow Joe's and sat on the deck sipping on a cool one and watching the ducks having a blast running the little rapids at the edge of the water.

Afterward we spent some time in the train museum. An amazing place; besides the miles and miles of micro towns operating for our pleasure, the walls in every room were covered with train cars and accessories. I understand this is one of the nation's top ten museums of its type. Eventually dusk settled in and it became cool and damp again. We donned sweatshirts and jackets to get back to our comfy hotel. We crashed and slept 12 hours.

The next day, dressed again for the chill, we rode to Deal's Gap. Today we'll do The "Tail of the Dragon". If you mention motorcycle riding in North Carolina, you'll be asked if you did The Dragon. Well, we did it! This 11 mile stretch supposedly has 318 curves in it.

That's possible if you mean going and coming, actually doing 22 miles.

our roads in Georgia have that Tail totally whipped when it comes to curves. Especially nice spacious ones! Nevertheless, I insisted Sam get a t shirt proclaiming he had whipped the dragon.

Back in Bryson City, we landed in Everett's again for a great soup and sandwich. Then, on our way to our room we stopped at a place called Iron horse. This campground has one particular requirement : motorcycles. You can park a motor home, pop-up, tent, or rent a cabin but you MUST have a bike. They have a large community room for eating and socializing, and a fire pit out back where everyone meets everyone else. Some food is provided but mostly everyone is out riding during the day and back for the evening. Very rustic, it looked like a fun place

. In our motel room later, we ate some fruit and fell asleep. Vacationing is hard work!

The next morning was even colder as we started out for home. We stopped at our favorite country store along the way, Sunrise Grocery, for a couple tomatoes and a teeny tiny pumpkin for our gnomes who recently took up residence in our tree.

Aaaahh yes… looking forward to sleeping in our own bed tonight.

2011 October. The first Sunday of the month, Sam and I went to Helen to catch a little of the Octoberfest music. The band playing was a favorite, The Stratton Mountain Boys. A few days later, we rode back up to Robbinsville and the Cherohala Skyway to check the leaves out again. We'd heard they were bright and gorgeous following a recent frost. We were gone over eight hours and saw some beautifully colored trees scattered on the hillsides. I found a neat Coca Cola tray at Nest Feathers, a little antique shop. It was good just being with Sam, riding with him all that time.

Our annual end of summer dinner drew a huge crowd. The requisite trashcan turkey appeared with bowls of gravy, a cheesy potato casserole and dozens of other goodies. I had no idea so many people were still here in the park. It turned into a great 'going away' party.

Back home: Things are changing for Kim and Loyd. She's doing well on her own. Has seen her lawyer a couple times and has established her own PO Box. She had Young Sam over for dinner and they had some serious talk about life.

One day the Mountain Cruisers rode to Ellijay for lunch and a fried apple pie. The crowd is thinning, only four bikes this time, but the weather's still fantastic.

We went to Habersham Electric's yearly shindig. This company spends their profits on their customers with music, door prizes and a terrific free dinner. Pretty neat.

We attempted to go to the Gold Rush Days at Dahlonega but it's so popular we couldn't even get near the town! Settled for Papa's Pizza. Good enough.

Kim arrived for a visit. She'd driven to Williamsburg To see friends and then to Georgia to see us. She does well getting around these confusing mountain roads. We took her to the Mountain Moonshine Festival at Dawsonville where they display hundreds of old cars used for running moonshine back in the forties. However, there was No moonshine.

One day she and I went to the 400 mall and shopped till we nearly dropped looking for jeans. Success, we had fun browsing Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware. This is an outlet mall and both these rather exclusive stores looked more like a warehouse going out of business than their counterparts in a regular mall. Prices were good but still expensive. We were pooped when we got back to the rig. Soon we had a smorgasbord of leftovers laid out and we each fixed a plate of favorites and ate dinner.

We made the bed from the rig's dining table and everyone got settled in. Sam found a couple old TV shows on the computer and soon everyone was off to laaLaa land.

By Friday we were ready to head home to Florida. Rain was coming to the mountains, a good time to skedaddle. We got out ahead of it and had a nice day on the road. And as always, it's good to be back.

2011 November. I thank God daily for Sam. We're fine. He's so sweet and tries so hard to keep things easy and happy for everyone. In early October Kim left Loyd and she's done pretty well since then. Now, though, realization sets in and I feel some depression in her. Mostly because her boys are too busy to care what is going on with her. They seem to be blaming her for the breakup. Hopefully one day they'll realize how much she loves them.

We saw a play about newsboys in New York City in 1920 being threatened with a strike. It was a great production. There were 7 in our party: a good holiday treat.

One day we visited Linda & Ron bearing gifts from Santa. That was fun! They surprised us with the makings of a complete steak dinner. A great gift. then we all went to the Steven Foster Park to see the lights and the arts n crafts again. I love sitting by the bon fire with our kazoos playing along with the Christmas carols, having a good time laughing and carrying on.

I'd suggested to Sam that after Kim's birthday shindig with her friends, which I'm expected to attend, we go back to Georgia for Christmas. He jumped at the idea. Big Curt will be at Kim's for the holidays so I felt free to do my own thing. We packed for our hiatus and drove up to the rig in PVC. We

settled right in. Very quiet here, not many folks around. we went to Dahlonega for dinner at Shenanigan's, admiring the Christmas lights along the way. At the Holly Theater we watched "A Buzzard Mountain Christmas". This was portrayed like a radio show with the participants dressed in country duds, standing around in front of tall skinny microphones as they read off their scripts and played hillbilly Christmas tunes.

It was freezing out and we finally achieved a nice holiday feeling!

The little town of Helen was cute as usual. We didn't see any special lighting for the season, but their regular village lights are precious all year round.

Sam received a camera for skyping and making videos for websites from Mrs. Claus, He's having a blast with it and says It's the very best one available. Thanks to the geeks at Best Buys. Like a little kid, he was up at 5 this morning playing with it. I half expected to see a video of myself on the tube, snoring. He'd already driven all over our campground with it on the dashboard and videoed many of the properties here.

Christmas day we picked up Carol & Gary and went to the Huddle House for dinner. It was fun and relaxing and the food was delicious; chopped steak smothered in mushroom onion gravy and veggies. I think I may never cook a holiday meal again! This was too easy.

We left early in the morning for home. Started out in rain but soon it was sunny and bright and we did most of the ride on back roads.

Kim cooked Christmas turkey while her dad and the boys were there. She said it was fine and she was thrilled she'd made gravy for the first time ever.

That Saturday she and I went to look for a ring for her in place of her defunct wedding band. We found a beautiful black onyx ring, her favorite stone. That was good; she'll start the new year with a new look and a happy attitude!

We nearly made it to 10 pm before crawling into bed. I don't think we'll ever see that ball drop at midnight again.

And so ended 2011. Bring on the New Year.

2012 January. Another gorgeous New Year's Day in Florida.

We just rode to the DQ for a bit of ice cream. But I'M starting out this New Year with the tail end of ahead cold. still all sneezy and runny this morning. Linda & Ron were going to have dinner with us but I had to cancel so they don't get my cooties. Sam cooked a pot of black eyed peas with ham to insure WE'D have a good year. Kim's working today and Laura had a couple shifts at the police department in Portland. Curtiss & Haley in New York went to friends' house for the celebrations and are probably getting over it this morning. Little Ellie is still hanging in there next door. She must weigh 80 pounds, if even that. But she's still spunky.

I shared my cold with Sam so now we're recovering together.

But today he's elated. Here's what's happened; last week his beloved jeep was diagnosed with a bad crank shaft that would cost 1400 bucks to fix. He didn't agree with the dealership diagnosis and began his own research. With his new video camera attached beneath the car while connected to his computer on the front seat, he saw cv joints bouncing like crazy down there while making a left turn. The entire Jeep vibrated and bounced fiercely while making that turn. Not every time but often enough to cause concern.

Then, quite by accident, he found paperwork showing he had insurance to cover all types of problems. So he took it in and showed the repair people the video and the insurance contract.

So everything is being repaired at no cost to him and he's a happy camper!

Meanwhile Kim's been dealing with the elders and counselors at her church. All this time they listen to Loyd as he tells them everything's fine. Three years ago we spent 2500 bucks on a lawyer and lost it because these elders

talked her into waiting, promising they'd help her if she didn't pursue the divorce at that time. . They didn't help one iota. So I wrote a letter to the church claiming in good conscience they owed that money back to her. We'll see where that goes. (Of course it went nowhere).

Silver Sneakers. We began a routine of exercise at the Y and we're really enjoying it. Now if we gcould just get our diets in that mode. Three times a week we do the elliptical machine along with seven other machines for abs, back, arms and legs. A good goal and so far, so good.

One day we met Dave & Judy for lunch in Saint Augustine. It was chilly out and we shouldn't have been surprised when they arrived in their car rather than the motor scooter we expected. They come from Daytona where the ocean breeze was colder than we had in Gainesville. Nice visit, though.

Kim and I attended a fashion show at our clubhouse, put on by Coldwater Creek. Sam was the music maestro and had those old gals struttin their stuff. Fun and funny.

That Saturday we went to the Valentine Dance in our clubhouse. I had a red party dress on and We started the dancing as soon as we got there. Others quickly came out and filled the floor. A fun time.

Several days later at the Webster Flea Market we found all sorts of stuff we didn't know we needed. It was a gorgeous day for outdoor shopping and a bike ride.

We started a Film Noire Night with Kim by watching another of my old favorite movies - Splendor In The Grass. Such a great movie and I just love Natalie Wood.

2012 March. PVC in Georgia.

Sam gets antsy when he can't keep an eye on the rig and the weather. It wasn't a problem but We've had a challenge or two that needed his attention. the generator isn't getting any gas from the gas tank. It can't start. Though a simple problem, He thinks it's a major thing to fix as the huge gas tank has to be dropped, and the hoses above it replaced. We made an appointment next week at a repair shop. That will be a nice little trip for the rig. We took it to Apalachee RV where they replaced a piece of hose inside the gas tank, not on top of it as Sam thought. So all is fine again and we can travel this summer.

Sam installed wood blinds in my office, aka, our second bedroom. Gone are the heavy drapes and the sheers. Up went my pretty, light green print curtains. I love this room now. So cute.

2012 April. A gorgeous month. This winter was abnormally warm nationwide, maybe even worldwide. Global warming is the big topic. Following a mild winter, spring came in like a lamb.

One day we met Dave & Judy for lunch at the Brass Monkey in Mount Dora.

But, oh my goodness, the funniest thing happened. At this restaurant There were monkey statues scattered here and there. One was on a window sill right next to Dave. So as we sat down Sam passed his ballcap to Dave to put on the nearby monkey's head. Lunch was good and it was fun with these friends. As we finished and rose to leave, Dave handed Sam his hat but something fell out of it right onto the table. What's that? a white paper or rag or something. Oh my gosh. It was a ladies mini pad! "What the heck?!" Dave yelped as he jumped back a couple steps.

Everyone Looked at it in disbelief! Dave claimed, "Don't look at me. I'm not touching that thing with a 10 foot pole!!" We all looked at Sam.

All he had to say about it was "Hey, that's the perfect sweat band for a ballcap!"

Let me explain; Sam's very innovative, constantly coming up with something to make things easier and life more comfortable. So, this very hot

day, unbeknownst to me, he'd taken one of my perfectly clean and dry mini pads and put it into his ballcap to keep the sweat off his forehead and out of his eyes.

And guess what… it works.

One day we rode with L&R to Ocala to see a truck Ron was interested in. The truck was gone but We had lunch and stopped at Harbor Freight where the boys checked out tools while Linda and I browsed at the Big Lots store. There was a pretty flowery Rose print cushion that would be perfect for my two seater porch swing. It seemed expensive, 30 bucks. I didn't buy it. A day or so later at Home Depot, similar ones were 88 dollars! Back to Big Lots for that prettier one! Twelve years later and it's still perfect.

Silver Springs in Ocala had half off the price for residents this month. Neither of us had been there in decades so we made a day of it. There was very little crowd, the weather was perfect, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. We had two boat rides: One was the jungle cruise in which we learned all sorts of history about this area of Florida. The other, the glass bottom boat, revealed the beautiful fish and wildlife at the bottom in perfectly clear water. We could see the humongous opening of the head of the spring that continuously flows with brand new fresh water from beneath the ground. This spring has brought billions of gallons of water, daily, to this area for millions of years. Then it flows to the Saint Johns River and on to the Atlantic. I'm amazed at all this fresh water when we hear talk of droughts. I guess I don't know how the aquifers and the eco system actually work. We learned of the many movies that had been filmed at this location as we looked right at the bottom of the river at a long lost Indian canoe and other interesting treasures beneath this clean, clear water. Absolutely Amazing!

2012 May. Still working out at the Y.

Yesterday we did our routine followed by 6 laps in the huge outdoor pool.

Kim and young Sam came over for a cookout. Young Sam spent a lot of time with My Sam that day. Later he said he'd had an epiphany of sorts. He realized he aught to spend more time with Sam because he's interesting and knows so much about so many things. Big Sam is so sweet about sharing his knowledge that everyone loves to be around collecting whatever tidbits they can. And Young Sam is no slouch either. He was recently elected Commander of his ROTC group for his senior year in high school. He's committed to doing well in school and works hard at anything he attempts.

On the 19th we Left Florida for our spot in the mountains. we arrived in PVC in the early afternoon. We worked in the yard all day Monday getting rid of all the leaves and winter debris. The weather is perfect and it's so pretty here in our campground. Today We're relaxing while the little washer is humming along in the rig and I'm catching up on computer stuff. Another afternoon shower is brewing and it's nice and cool with the windows open.

Back home, Kim went to the ROTC Ball and Awards Banquet. I was a little apprehensive for her because Loyd and his Mom were going and all were to share a table. Just last week K&L had their mediation meeting with the lawyers. I was afraid going to this dinner was too soon. But it worked out. She wanted to show young Sam her support and pleasure at his accomplishments. Nothing derogatory was said and everyone was fine.

In PVC, Georgia. Sam & I rode to Alto, Georgia, to see the old fort Hollingsworth. We wandered through a house that originally was the fort, built in 1793 and enlarged around 1868. The fellow giving the tour is a direct descendant of the White family who built the house generations ago. This area, including the fort and our own PVC property, are in White county. All named after his predecessors. We visited many buildings on the grounds that were relocated from around the state. And we saw a reenactment of the Civil War.

At PVC our Memorial Day fare didn't fair so well under the new regime. it was a disaster. Don't know what Sam had but I eventually fixed a bowl of cottage cheese with a hard boiled egg and a tomato slice chopped into it. Yummy. Maybe that's what we get for celebrating Memorial Day on the 28th instead of the 30th as it's been for the past fifty years.

2012 June. We met Art & Pat in Blairsville at The Hole In The Wall and had a surprisingly good meal. Afterward we went across the square to the courthouse for another free hillbilly concert. This bluegrass group, Brushfire, was fun. We bring our own cushions to sit on now because the pews are so hard. It was nice to have time with these friends again, especially since we thought they were no longer coming to Georgia. A pleasant surprise.

One morning I put loud rock n roll on the radio, poured myself a Pepsi and cleaned house for a couple hours. Like when I was a kid in Ohio. The next few days were cloudy, cool and spotty with rain. Between spurts Sam cooked cabbage over the fire and ended up with a delicious stew. Finally it cleared up and we rode to Macy's for a couple things we needed.

Friday evening Carol and Gary came by while Sam cooked rainbow trout over the fire for all of us. We topped off the meal with a couple glasses of wine. A pleasant evening. These are the nice neighbors who gave us the swing we all enjoy.

The board meeting was pleasant that month, thank heaven. Some laughs and high spirits. I noticed some of the main players of last year are not attending these functions. The party line has slipped back to some of the folks who were in charge when we first came here. Such high politics. But we don't mind. We're neutral and friendly with all.

Laura, in Portland, received acceptance in the new job she's starting. She'll be a provider to young adults with Asperger's Syndrome. This is a mild form of Autism and these folks generally need help organizing their lives, socializing, and just getting through the days. The Brokerage will send her names from Medicare. She'll assist them with life's daily challenges like driving them somewhere or cooking with them occasionally, or whatever. It'll be her own business. She's already acquired her LLC so will be insured against lawsuit. She'll do well at this.

Oh good Grief! Sam made a recording of his Harley as he rode thru the curves and hills around here. Then he made a CD of this recording and gave it to Paul whose mode of transportation is a motorized wheel chair as he has only one leg. Paul installed a CD player on his chair. Now he fires up his" Harley" chair and sits there for a bit bouncing around like it's running. Then he takes off, leaving all bystanders in the dust. It's hilarious. There was a bit of a problem at first, though. The recording was too short. He said he got a certain distance from home and it cut off. Said he had to walk home!!

We died laughing.

We met a new couple and went for a bike ride to Mercier's Apple Fest at Blue Ridge with them. We had a good time together. The next evening as we sat by the fire Roy & Patti came and we introduced them to Karen and Floyd. We all decided to go to Bingo the next evening. So we had eats at the International where we figured out how to split the winnings if any of us won at bingo, especially if one of us got the 750 dollar jackpot! The discussion was lost in the wind.

Saturday, with nothing to eat in the house, Sam & I went to a Mexican restaurant nearby. We'd heard great things about it and they were true. Their Nachos were fabulous.

Sunday afternoon we picked up our friend, Linda, and went to a concert in Sautee. Her hubby, Dwayne, sings with a performing choir. The program was great. Afterward the four of us went to that Mexican restaurant and shared fajitas. So nice to be with these two; they're both hard workers and so sweet.

One day while riding with Roy & Patti and Karen & Floyd, Sam took us on back roads to Lake Burton, past the 8 million dollar homes along the waters edge on Murray Cove Road. It was my birthday and we had lunch there at the Le Prada Marina Chop House. The whole group, including our waitresses, sang a rousing Happy Birthday to me. How fun!

We had a wonderful time together and made plans for one more ride before we leave on our trip west but by the end of the month it was so hot around here, most plans were skuttled.

June 30 was 105 degrees. Hoping for a cool snapsoon.

Here's a funny thing that happened at that restaurant last year: Nan & I were in the ladies room… I reached up to the soap dispenser mounted on the wall at the end of the counter. It was up, at eye level, and it was the type that you pushed up from the bottom a few times to get Soap in the palm of your hand. I pumped and pumped …on the third pump the whole bottle flew up into the air and crashed into a wall behind me!! OOPS!

2012 July. Summer came broiling into Paradise Valley with well over a hundred degree readings. The entire Midwest and up and down the east coast suffered with extreme heat. It actually caused weird, wild storms to form. They came through, uprooting trees and knocking power out to Millions of homes from the Midwest to the Atlantic Ocean. For ten days, while temps hovered around 105 degrees, these folks had no air conditioning in their homes or even a fan that works without electricity. Many are living in their basements in search of relief.

In the midst of this we began our Midwest Trip leaving PVC on Friday, July 6th. Preparations had been made, the rig was road worthy, and we're singing "On The Road Again" along with Willy.

When we start out I always pass up and down thru the rig listening for rattling glasses and checking drawers that like to sling open if not properly secured. I'd already locked down everything in the refrigerator with tension bars… but then I didn't remember doing that bottom shelf where tall cartons of juice, milk and the like are happily keeping cool. As we merrily swing left and right along the curvy Paradise Valley Road, I opened the fridge door very, very slowly and carefully. I reached in to make sure all was well when CRASH. The tea container, the only glass thing in there, fell right out onto the floor and broke. I quickly grabbed a bath towel and threw it down on the floor but most of the tea had already disappeared beneath cabinets and out of sight. Oh boy, I hope this isn't an omen of things to come. We're barely a mile from home. And where the heck did all that tea go, anyway?!

Our first stop is Mount Airy, North Carolina. Andy Griffith's boyhood home. We arrived at Mayberry Campground around 5 and learned that there'd be a hot dog cook out in an hour at the top of the hill under the trees. Wonderful. We had no plans for dinner. Soon we met other campers and everyone was telling stories and discussing their favorite things to do in town.

Armed with this knowledge we headed to town first thing in the morning to hear some bluegrass music at a jam session at the old Earle Theater. We were early and while waiting we chatted with an elderly couple from this area. The man had gone to school with Andy Griffith and They told us stories about Andy as a boy. We spent quite awhile in the Museum of Regional History and, among other things, learned by video exactly how to make moonshine. Also, we learned of the world's largest granite stone quarry, which is right there in Mount Airy. This one piece of grey granite covers more than 19 acres. Stone masons have been working and chipping away at it for over a hundred years and they say they could continue for five hundred more! We rode out from town, only about a mile or so, and viewed this impressive site for ourselves. It was Amazing. Well worth the effort.

We wandered in The Emporium for over an hour browsing through three floors of interesting, useful items. We ate at Barney's and eventually made our way to the Andy Griffith Museum. On the way back to the campground we saw the house where Andy grew up. It is a nice looking, unpretentious home not far from the center of town. Mount Airy, like so many of our small towns across the country, is a memorial to life in an earlier, simpler era.

Leaving Mount Airy, we rode on to Greenbrier State Forrest in West Virginia. Along the way we saw signs of that storm with downed trees lying on either side of the road waiting to be removed. This campground has had its difficulties with folks stranded in their rigs for nearly two weeks. No power for getting water or electric and the local gas stations unable to pump gas. What a mess it must have been for them until they could finally move on. Luckily, we have a generator, lots of gas in the tank and a full tub of water on board. so we can stay here a few days and see how it works out. This is a beautiful and very dense forest and there's much to see around

here. On Monday we were on the Cass Scenic Railroad. This is an old logging train heading up a very steep mountain. It is powered by a Shay locomotive, a steam engine built expressly for getting such a lumbering train up to the top and then getting it safely back down with its cargo of huge red spruce trees. The mountain is so steep they must use two switchbacks along the way.

In this case switchback means the train goes forward up and across the mountain a distance. Then it stops, the track is switched, and going backward it continues climbing uphill in reverse on the new track. Then that track is switched and the train continues forward again uphill on another track to the top.

As we rode to the top and back down we learn some of the history of the lumber industry at the turn of the last century. When Sam volunteered here some years ago part of his job was narrating on this train.

The town of Cass and all the surrounding area is now part of the Cass Scenic Railroad State Park.

For our skiing buffs out there, our next thrill was to drive up to Snowshoe Mountain Ski Resort. These two places were the perfect things to do on such a hot day. Up here we were very chilly. This is a wonderland of gorgeous resorts, shops, restaurants and fun things like ski lifts. We watched as guys and gals came up the mountain side in a lift chair, jumped off and grabbed their bikes from the chair behind them and rode down the mountain again. They were having a blast in all their riding gear and helmets. Too scary for these old codgers.

Next we stopped at the Green Bank Radio Telescope. Who knew such a thing existed here in quiet little West Virginia? This super tall structure was built to monitor sounds that may be coming from other planets. The antenna, similar to a satellite dish, can be turned to any degree where someone might want to track or listen for extra terrestrials. A museum depicting the history of this structure is nearby. The telescope itself eliminates any use of cell phones for miles around. It was amazing. And to

top off our day, now that we were back down to earth and in the heat again, they had a little counter in the museum with soft ice cream cones.

The Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. What an interesting place.

We visited the Greenbrier Hotel and we toured “The Bunker.” But just as we entered the pretty drive up to the entrance, A gatekeeper asked for our reservation. Huh? Sorry, can’t let you up there without a reservation. This is the home of the Greenbrier Classic Golf tournament and that event had just finished. But he did suggest we park in the lot across the road and walk up. This is a long, nicely manicured drive winding uphill and out of sight.

When we got back to his gate on foot, feeling like a couple of lowlife ragamuffins, I guess he took pity on us. He suggested we take a shortcut through an area of trees and plants and come out right at the front door of the Greenbriar. There was no path through there and as we stepped over and around the plants and through the trees we felt sure we would be arrested for trespassing or trying to sneak in. Soon we stood in front of a huge white building with hundreds of lovely windows covering the entire front of it. With the attending columns and the portico, it made me think of the White House. An extremely nice attendant took us under his wing and soon we had secured a reservation for the 2pm tour of’ the underground’. With two hours to fill, we went inside and browsed the public areas, in and out of the many specialty shops, and finally I made their day by purchasing a Greenbrier visor. We found our way down beautifully carpeted stairs to Draper’s restaurant and a casino. We had lunch seated in a colorfully printed booth. It was very lush and proper and actually not too expensive. We sat chatting about seeing the bunker soon and wondering what it would be like. Would there be gold plated ladders going down a manhole and would you have to jump the last 4 or 5 feet at the bottom? And would they have gold toilet seats for our VIP’s? If you know Sam, you know how he can elaborate on a subject so of course one thing led to another and soon we were not being very posh and proper with our giggles. But we really didn’t know what to expect. You may have heard rumors in past years about the underground bunker our government built as a shelter for our congressmen and representatives in the case of nuclear attack from Russia. Well, the secret is out and It’s no longer a viable option. It's now a tourist attraction. It was very impressive. And for thirty years it was hidden in plain sight. This

underground bunker, about 250 miles from DC, was expected to house 1100 people for up to 60 days.

Thankfully, it was never needed for the purpose for which it was planned. However, many areas of it have always been in use for seminars, parties and special events. People going to these events would never have realized they were in such a solid, confined and safe place, under ground! They were simply going to a posh function at the Greenbrier Hotel.

Our 90 minute tour was amazing. Although it's an underground bunker, we actually left the meeting room floor and went upstairs to another floor to enter it.

. No one in 1962 would have thought of looking up for an underground facility. But, such are the mountains of West Virginia. The hotel itself is worth the trip but the bunker tour was unbelievable. Thank you Sam for taking me to such interesting and wonderful places….

And let me say, this sure beats the goat lick in Montana!

On our last full day here we went west about 60 miles to see a huge gorge with a very long, arched, bridge across it. The "New River" is probably the oldest river in our country, having been formed when Africa and America crashed into each other eons ago. In the 19th and 20th centuries This gorge was the site of much mining with over twenty little coal mining towns all along the river. At the State River Museum we watched an interesting film and we handled many early mining tools. Today the area has become a hub of water sports and night life with neat restaurants, a pool, public showers for returning rafters and kayakers and miles of decking. A fun place for weekenders.

Our campground, The Greenbrier State Forest, got its electric power restored nearly two weeks after it went dark. The morning we were leaving we were hooked up, ready to pull the rig and car out, moving very carefully so as not to hit any trucks or stuff scattered along the way. Many locals milled around, their vehicles parked haphazardly along the narrow roadway, watching us with dower faces as Sam tried to maneuver through. Everyone stopped what they were doing to watch. They didn't speak or smile or nod

as we tried to pass by. They seem clannish and brooding And mistrustful of anyone. We felt like intruders. Obviously they didn't want us here.

Then just as Sam began to move through the obstacles the side of our rig began to scrape on a green,nearly invisible steel site marker. Not one person warned him or wave him to stop as they stood right next to that post. Luckily he heard the scraping and stopped immediately. He unhooked the car, moved the rig and hooked the car back up again. Finally someone actually moved his truck out of the way. What a bunch of bumpkins. We couldn't believe it.

Later Sam told me about working that train as a volunteer several years ago. None of the other workers ever spoke with him or laughed or joked. He couldn't wait to finish that gig.

Thus ended our strange yet informative tour of West Virginia.

Columbus, Ohio. We had several days here with my nephew's family. , Eric and Mindy have two boys, Thomas and Michael, 11 and 5, and five acres of pasture land for kite flying and wheeling. But It didn't take long for them to realize Sam has some pretty cool toys himself. Soon they were spending all their spare time playing Angry Birds on the Kindle Fire and on Sam's computer. we instigated a time share routine to keep the peace. Hot dogs and smores were top billing until Mindy brought out her zucchini cake. The boys wrinkled up their noses at the name of it but had no complaints once they tasted it. It was delicious. Who knew?

We spent several days with Eric and his family. This is my brother Tom's youngest child. I'd lived in Florida all the years he and his siblings were growing up in Ohio So It was great to exchange stories and break bread together. After hugs and well wishes we pulled out to head to Michigan.

In Clare, Michigan we had camping rights to a friend's nice shady site where we caught up on cooking and laundry. A nice surprise awaited us in Cadillac, Michigan. The hundred and something year old library is now an historic museum. As we walked in I noticed that it smelled just like the library of my childhood. A nice gentleman greeted us and began telling of its

history and all. Then a lady came into the foyer and soon she guided me into a room and began telling me of all the wonderful old things in there. She turned on the Victrola and let it play quietly. She understood I wasn't seeing too far into the displays and allowed me to go beyond the rope barriers to touch and feel many of the things in there. We spent about two hours with Thelma and Gary. It was fabulous.

In the end as we stood chatting, I asked her if she was the curator of the museum and learned that indeed she was. Her husband didn't like her being there alone so he became a docent. They love to show folks all the wonderful things they have. We had a hard time leaving but were getting quite hungry

While looking for a café, we saw a huge Shay locomotive right there in the middle of the square. What a coincidence! We'd just ridden on a Shay driven train in West Virginia and here is the exact same engine used for logging.

Then we visited my brother In Midland and two of his daughters, Jen and Sarah, came by and I couldn't believe how grownup they are. The weather was perfect as we sat in their back yard in the shade of a willow tree stuffing our faces and catching up. It was nice getting together with them.

Next stop : northern Michigan.

2012 July. Old Mission Peninsula.

We moved upstate a hundred miles to Chain o Lakes Campground near Bellaire. Our first stop here was in the tiny town of Alden at a quaint little nook called The Muffin Top Café. It was friendly and the breakfast great. But Most folks were ordering cheesecakes and pastries. On the way out Sam noticed the sign again and realized he had previously misread it. It is actually The Muffin Tin Café, not the Muffin Top. . But I think our first reading was more accurate.

Here's a trivia question : what state in the USA has the most shoreline? Would you be surprised to learn It's not Florida or California but Michigan! Well they certainly do have tons of water surrounding the state plus millions of lakes within. That's a lot of waterfront property. And it makes for beautiful riding as all the roads gently sweep around one lake or another.

Today we gently swept our way over to Traverse City, taking the beautiful route around a long, skinny body of water called Torch Lake. The homes along the shoreline were named Reflection, Rock Bottom, The Perfect Landing and That's All Folks!

At Traverse City we looked for a birthday present for Sam. He wanted a new camera. The local Walmart showed him the latest thing… A GoPro. Now he's excited.

we head up to The Old Mission Peninsula, one of many 'must see' places in this area. You drive seven miles up a skinny finger of land. It's hardly even shown on the map. At the very tip is an original 1850, hand hewn log cabin. Across the way from it is the lighthouse. Unlike any other, this is a very small house with a tall dormer on top holding the light. Most of the beach at the tip of this peninsula is rough and rocky with only one section of nice, clean sand and a pavilion for public enjoyment. There's an inn that's still in use, and a rustic restaurant where we stopped for lunch. This was a surprise: One room in here is an art museum including bronze and other sculptures as well as fine paintings. The elegant dining room has floral carpeting and white linen cloths. And the food, excellent! And it was all air conditioned. Who knew!

Thinking we'd missed the Mission we backtracked a bit to find it. but no, The Mission is the entire community. A Presbyterian minister settled here and began Christianizing the Native Americans.

We stopped at the old dilapidated General Store to ask directions and were informed that we were there! The whole area IS The Mission!

This store was built before 1800 and in 1898 the wood floor was replaced. So the floor we were walking on was over 110years old and the building was probably well over 200. We had a history lesson from the old gentleman as he poured homemade root beer from the keg for Sam and made a phosphate for another customer. All the while talking of the days of old

. This was a regular stopping place for Henry Ford and his cronies, Edison, Rockefeller, Biltmore and other prominent fellows that called themselves the vagabonds. This was probably the second site of an internal combustion engine rejuvenation point, also known as a gas station. It was, in fact, A Red Wing Gas Station. Ford shipped fuel to certain locations so he and the

Vagabonds could travel to Chicago and New York. It must have been interesting to always make sure you could get home again.

On the way back to the mainland we drove by apple orchards and corn fields, and small businesses…

And lots of cherry bushes! Bushes?? when I was a kid I used a tall ladder and reached up high in a tree for cherries. Today they grow on bushes. They put a big umbrella underneath and shake the fruit off the branches. Well, thank goodness they're still delicious.

We stopped at a growers where they had three different types of cherries and we were encouraged to try them all, so we did. We selected the sweetest, of course. Then the farmer twisted our arm and made us get a chocolate covered black cherry ice cream on a stick. Oh, Pure Torture.

Tomorrow: Mackinaw or Mackinac Island. Either spelling, its still pronounced Mackinaw.

2012 July. Tuesday should be a good day to go to the Island. Wrong. It was like being in Key West during a festival, But what a fun adventure. We caught the 11:30AM jet boat to the island and arrived ready for lunch. Stepped off the boat and flowed with the crowd up an alley about a block and came out on the main street into a huge throng of humanity. Several blocks to our left and TO our right were lined with restaurants, fudge shoppes and stores. We were shoulder to shoulder walking along on the sidewalk and the street was absolutely full of bicycles. Along each curb were hundreds of them waiting to be rented. The center of the road itself was an undulating mass of gliders on wheels going in both directions; singles, tandems and some pulling wagons with kids in them. It was hard to believe so many people were here today. Had they all arrived by boat?!

Since we've been thinking of pizza the past few days we chose The Island Slice for lunch. It was great. As we sat eating ours, we spread the word to folks in the nearby line and everyone decided to drop the cannoli and go with the Pizza. We bought tickets for the carriage ride. There was an hour and a half wait for the next one so we went for a stroll. As we left the mass of

humanity behind us the island became quiet and pretty. From the walkway you looked down the sloping hill to the beach. A few scattered bikes went by on the road completing their 7 mile ride around the island. We Crossed the street and strolled past one beautiful old house after another. These were private homes with white picket fences and pretty dormers and porches.

Some folks live here all year round. They go to Saint Ignace on the mainland for midwinter supplies. Once Lake Michigan is safely frozen, trees are set up as markers from the island to the mainland so they can find their way to and from. They use sleighs and snowmobiles to transport their purchases.

But on this day, bright and sunny as it was, we walked up the side streets to the crest of the hill. We saw the Grand Hotel which seems to be the guardian of the island from its high perch. A big yachting event was in progress and maybe that explains the size of the crowd. A band played as the sailors partied. They were celebrating their great achievements In the hotel's expansive, lush front lawn. We moseyed back into town just in time for our horse & carriage ride.

Our surrey had fringe on top. As is proper. And thankfully our tour excluded that busy main street and took us immediately into other parts of the island as we learned more of its history. For instance, I was unaware that there was a fort on the island. Mackinac Island is strategically placed for guarding the US. mainland from attack by water so it makes sense that we'd build a fort there. It's changed hands several times between the British and the Americans during its career as guardian of the land. Half way through our ride we stopped at a museum/gift shop and switched buggies. Now we had a three horse power carriage, as opposed to the previous two horse powered buggy. We went further uphill into the woods and the undeveloped part of the island. We passed the cemetery and our driver continued to fill our heads with historic information. Our tour ended at the fort where we could stay a while or head back to town. We figured it's got to be 5 o'clock somewhere and went into town.

Mackinac Island's fudge shops have been renowned for over a hundred years so we bought the obligatory box and headed for the boat dock.

Today I learned what the U P is. I mean, I knew it was the Upper Peninsula, but I thought it was the northern part of the state. Well, as we rode on the bridge of the jet boat, and Sam was videoing the beautiful Mackinac Bridge, I

realized that the U P is a separate, unattached part of Michigan. This bridge connects the Upper to the Lower Peninsula and does not connect Mackinac Island to the mainland. The U P is rustic and rugged. a good place for camping and hunting. Sorry to say, we're not going to make it there this trip.

A day or so later found us goggle eyed at the huge dunes on the shore of Lake Michigan. This is a strange sight for one who spent the last fifty years in Florida near the flat, sandy beaches of the Gulf Coast. First of all, let me tell you why it's called Sleeping Bear Dunes. An Indian legend tells of a Mama bear and her two cubs swimming across Lake Michigan in search of food. When she arrived here ,she looked for her babies to come ashore but they never did. They had drowned about 12 miles out; First one and then the other. As she dragged herself onto land she turned and saw two little islands arise from the water marking the graves of her cubs. Thus North and South Manitou Islands were born. According to the legend she slept right there at the edge of the water sorrowfully waiting for her babies.

Her body became one with the land. So sad.

We entered a national park, which for the most part is a forest, and took the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive. As we got near the Lake Michigan shore and parked in one of the assigned areas, we'd be either at the bottom of a pile of sand, or we'd be on top of a sheer wall looking down at the water. These dunes run 35 miles along this coast. Our first excursion on foot was from the top of a high one. We left the car and walked a short distance through some trees to an open sandy area. Just a few steps across it and we were at the edge of a Two thousand foot drop off.

There was Lots of activity up here. Folks slowly, carefully scooted down this nearly perpendicular wall while others were much more slowly crawling on hands and feet, trying to get back up. I took about five steps down, sinking further with each one, and realized I didn't want to go there. Sam was more daring...

He headed down with his new camera in hand. I lost track of him in the mass of people until finally he popped up, red faced, panting and sweating. How far did you go? I asked. Oh man, he wheezed.

Not even a quarter of the way. To cool off, we walked around up here on the path that took us out to an overlook that extended over the water a bit. From here we could see all those monkeys scrambling up and down that wall of sand. We must admit that none of the scramblers were in our age bracket.

Our next stop was called Dune Climb. Pulling into the designated parking lot Sam took one look at the mountain of sand in front of us and decided we didn't need to do that. But wait! I wailed, (love that word) we're here. I want to see it and do a little climb. It didn't look too difficult as it was a slanted hill whereas the previous one was nearly perpendicular. I began walking up. Very quickly I was using my hands as well as my feet. Then I came to a complete stop, exhausted already. This was hard work ! He passed me by for a short distance. I thought I was about halfway up to the top but he said not quite. A gal coming down told us that After you get to this top you go over a bit and climb the next one. Then there's a third one before you can see the lake below.

Oh Good grief! We went down. Not going to see the lake from here.

You have to wonder about the formation of these monstrous dunes, though. A phenomenon not repeated in too many places. but well worth the trip if you get the opportunity.

We visited the Life Saving Station at Glen Haven. In the boat house were some rescue boats used over a hundred years ago. We saw demonstrations of how they rescued distressed ships. They say there are hundreds and hundreds of them at the bottom of these waters, especially between the Manitou Islands and the mainland. Near the boathouse was the original quarters of these rescuers, now turned into a museum. These Life Saving Stations preceded today's Coast Guard.

Charlevoix Petoskey and Greenfield Village.

Still at Chain O Lakes Campground. Sam noticed a flywheel tractor show was being set up for the weekend. He was excited. He yakked with those old gents and videoed them with all their machinery. He was in seventh heaven.

The other day in Charlevoix we had lunch and checked out the cute town. We browsed in some upscale shops and we ate at Scovie's. The city of Charlevoix is along the edge of an inlet and has several marinas and restaurants on the water. The lake is literally covered with boats. A summer wonderland.

The main street in town is 4 or 5 blocks long and only two lanes wide. Most of the time the cars seem to be standing still. The reason being that there's a drawbridge right in town. There's a channel that every one of those boats use to go in or out of Lake Michigan. Most simply go under, but many are taller and need the bridge open and allow them through. All through lunch we heard the monotonous clanging of a bell so we followed the noise and found our way to the bridge. Beneath it there's a nice wide staircase and a pretty walk out to the Lake. We strolled along this walk as one boat after another went out or came back through the canal. A busy water highway. Colorful tugboats, speed boats, family yachts and even a barge being towed by a tug slowly passed by. We watched as a very large ship appeared at the mouth of the passage and slowly approached. It didn't seem like it would fit in this channel. It was a three or four deck ferry boat. Everyone on land and onboard waved at each other as it slid on through. Of course the bridge went up for that one.

As we strolled toward the lake watching the boats on our right, at our left were beautifully attended lawns rising upward to the backsides of some lovely old homes and hotels. A pretty setting.

From there we drove to Petoskey . The home of the famous Petoskey Stone; a particular type of coral, unique to this area. Folks used to find it on the beaches. It was formed eons ago when this land was underwater and near to

the equator. But that's an interesting story in itself that you might like to Google. Since they're rarely found on the beach these days we cheated and bought one.

We made a last desperate attempt at getting a pasty for me and finally hit on a sort of success. A waiter in the restaurant we checked with was familiar with them. Mostly they're found in the U P and are of Swedish or Finnish origin. He explained that they were a baked pastry shell with meat, even ground beef, potato, carrots, and onion or whatever inside. I've come across these in many English novels and have wondered for years what they were like. They were sold like hot cross buns or fish from a stand on English streets. It's like a meat and vegetable turnover. And are there any here in Petoskey I asked. The reply, No. The closest I would find any would be from the freezer section in the grocery store. My final question for this font of information: How do you pronounce pasty Definitely with a short 'A'. Well, alright! By the way, we tried the store variety. I liked it, Sam didn't. I'm sure they're better made with your

own favorite ingredients and freshly baked.

Let me tell you of a total surprise we happened onto the other day. You might know about this but neither Sam nor I had ever heard of Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.

This humongous complex was put together by Henry Ford and opened in 1929.

Once inside, you've stepped back in time to 1929. The first thing we did was take a bus tour around the entire village, getting our bearings. Interestingly, this bus actually was built in '29 and held more of everyone's attention than the tour did. Then we rode in an original Model T. During each of these rides our drivers crammed as much history into us as possible. Then we headed out on foot. We stopped to chat with a young fellow in knickers and suspenders about his new two wheeled bicycle; the type with a four foot front wheel and a tiny back one. As he finished, he stepped on a peg and pushed off like using a scooter. He flung his leg over and off he went. No problem. I always wondered how they got up on those bikes.

Nearby was a little picket fence guarding Henry Ford's childhood home which had been moved here from its original site three miles away. We were in a neighborhood of stately homes that had belonged to famous people of this era and had been relocated here. We walked through an exact replica of Edison's power plant: Illuminating Company Station A. Ford worked for Edison as an engineer for about eight years in his twenties and gained the skills needed to create his own plants later in life. He was past 40 when he began the automatic mobile business. This huge plant is full of boilers and generators and machinery that it required to make electricity. It's now used only to light the 35watt bulbs here in the plant.

We stopped for lunch at the Eagle Tavern where we were warmly welcomed by the owner. He explained that he and his wife purchased this establishment just last year, in '49, and he was sure we would enjoy the fare. Mind you, that would have been 1849! Our menus were printed and all the food was prepared from cookbooks of the 1850s. Our dinner, it's not called lunch, was wonderful. I had a drink and my straw was a macaroni tube!

We visited The Roundhouse where a huge steam engine sitting on the precision track could be pushed by hand, turning it 180 degrees. Or it could be lined up with another track and sent into the big garage for cleaning and repairs. It was amazing to see young kids pushing this huge engine around. Even little kids could make an engine face a different direction. This is actually a working garage.

We stopped in at the Wright Brothers bicycle Shoppe and saw their tools and bikes and some of their early airplane motors. Later, as we browsed in the grocery store, the grocer was dealing with an unhappy customer. We had walked right into a vignette depicting the life of a small town grocer in 1850 as he dealt with an irate customer.

Later, as we walked out of town on a dirt road we came to a farmhouse. We entered the back door right into the kitchen where women were cleaning up after feeding the farmhands their noon meal.

We all chatted a bit about recipes. The kitchen was hot and the woodburning stove was still cooking jam. They offered us warm leftovers. We'd entered the house right into the kitchen like neighbors stopping by. No roped off area to keep us at a distance. We stood there chatting about a cucumber salad a woman was making and we compared her recipe with one I'd used just the day before.

This whole scene was such a nice surprise.

At this point we'd been walking about five hours. So we hopped a train and rode the perimeter of the village. I think Sam caught a catnap during the ride. Then we went on: saw a machine shop, passed by the millinery, visited the print shop, the pottery shop and countless others. We hit all the highlights that interested us. A person could spend days here in Greenfield Village. Next time you're near Detroit make a plan to stop for a day or two and check it out. It's well worth it.

2012 August. Michigan, Ohio and 50th Reunion.

Still visiting hot spots and family. We left Chain O Lakes Campground and landed in the Wally World near my brother in Midland, Michigan. Steve and Cheryl met us for linguini and we spent a day at the Midland Historic Museum. They'd never been there and it was pretty neat. We visited "the oldest house" which had been moved onto these grounds and furnished in period style. They had a Carriage House containing several surreys, sleighs, carriages and a working blacksmith shop. Then Steve came with us to go to Jen's house near Detroit. We rode the people mover to the highlights of town. Like Disney World's, this people mover is about four stories up and travels from building to building throughout Detroit. A speedy and comfortable way to get around. I had no idea there was such a thing in the city! Too cool.

We left Steve at Jen's and moved on to visit folks in Ohio. My other brother, Mick, and Mo live in Kent. Mo has a restaurant called Taco Tonto's where she makes the best and the healthiest burritos ever. They're so dang good! We Sat out by the fire several evenings enjoying the Ohio weather. It was

great to see Liam again. At 6 foot 3 and in college, He's involved in dance and thinks he'd like to work on a cruise line as an entertainer. Sam made a video of his routines for auditioning.

While visiting friends we went for some real Polish Food. I had My very first pierogi at Sokolowski's in Cleveland. I can't believe, since I'm half Polish, I'd never had one before this . Afterword we just goofed around, laughing the day away.

One evening Sam & I and Mo listened to Mick and his group playing at Dominic's in Cuyahoga Falls. They have a great sound. Mick writes all their stuff and is lead singer. FYI: That's Mick Rogers,

We moved the rig to Mosquito Lake near Warren and set up house for the next week or so. Our first day there was cool, rainy and relaxing.

we had lunch at the Mocha Café near Saint Mary's Catholic School, my Alma Mater in downtown Warren. This little two-story building was k thru 12. We walked all around it and I explained how it was for me as a child. Poor school, though, is old and tired now. but still in use. We heard children singing as we wandered around nearby.

My house on Hunter Street was only 1.3miles from it. Geez, it sure seemed like five or six miles when I walked or biked it all those years!

The next day we had lunch with my very first love, Dave. Sam and I met him and his lady friend, at the Sunrise Inn downtown. It was the first time we all got together and it was pretty nice.

I feel so bad for him, though. He was always in great shape exercising and working out and kept himself in terrific shape … until the day he fell off his roof. He's been in physical therapy for several years now. He speaks slowly and walks with a cane. Geez, what a shame. my first love. I remember him in grade school; so cute with his dark glasses and pretty blonde wavy hair. At 13 or so we actually dated for a while. He is the one I never forgot.

One day Sam & I went to That 60 year old landmark in my neighborhood, The Hot Dog Shoppe, with Nancy & Don . after our fix, we drove downtown to see the new River Walk along the Mahoning River. In this area there were many new memorials to see. It's very impressive. I'm happy to note the old Log Cabin is still there for children to visit Santa with their precious wishes. That old black cannon is still there amidst new signage depicting historical info about Warren and our involvement in the underground Railroad. And there's even an amphitheater there now. It was heart warming to see these tributes from my home town.

We crossed the street and walked up the diagonal walk that cuts through the block where our majestic courthouse sits at the top of a knoll. I passed by here every school day weather permitted and never noticed its beauty. Thus began a week of realizations, revelations and reminiscences. Later we all sat around doing just that.

My High School reunion.

Well friends, we're nearly at the end of our travels for this year. It's been fun sharing it with you. The one thing that might have been fun to write about is the high school reunion. Fifty years ago I left all these friends and moved to Florida. At first I thought a reunion would be fun, but then realization set in. I'm afraid my synopsis of this event will go something like this:

"With great anticipation we got all gussied up to attend my class reunion. We arrived at the designated place, at the correct time, but were sad to see only a crowd of old folks milling around. We went home."

Thank goodness, that's not quite how it happened. Read on...

What fun! who knew what a wonderful time one would have visiting friends from childhood and high School. My first reaction that evening was tears. Suddenly, just being with them was so emotional. We met at one of the oldest houses in downtown Warren, the Upton House. We all wandered in and out of the lovely rooms catching snippets of information from each other. most of our Class of 1962 were present. The highlight was the Photo room.

Pictures were laid out on tables. oos and aahs and laughter continuously poured from there. Time flew by…

all too soon we had to say good night. Tomorrow would be an even bigger day!

That afternoon brought more friends outdoors in a nice relaxing atmosphere at Sharon's house. While munching on delectable goodies and exchanging life stories cameras flashed constantly. Some went to the lawn to play bocci ball and the afternoon nearly ran into evening.

Then, at Leo's Restaurant everyone showed up for one last opportunity to spend time with more old friends. The low hum in the room reached a crescendo as everyone greeted one friend after another. It was wonderful. All around were greetings and hugs. Sam knew very few of my friends but was terrific making sure I talked with everyone.

I'd been looking forward to this evening and it was well worth the wait. I'll probably never see these friends again. A happy sad time…. and all too soon it was over.

The next day at our campsite we had a family cook out. We needed to relax. Everyone sat around well into the evening. A perfect last day.

Two days later we were back in Georgia regaling everyone with our stories.

We'd had 15 free nights at Walmart that made up for gas going from $3.05 to 4.19.

Later… Oops, this month isn't over yet.

Hurricane Isaac drove Nancy & Bob from their nest in Alabama and they arrived here the other day. we've been busy ever since. It's fun, cooking and browsing together in little Cleveland and eating out. One benefit of this surprise visit for me was when we were all in our rig talking and Nancy said something about their bed. I asked her to lie down on ours and tell us what

she thought. She exclaimed ”OMG! That mattress is shot! Within two days we had a new one.

That evening Sam did his chicken and finally we sat by the fire together, just enjoying it.

2012 September. Labor Day. Quiet week end with mixed showers. Saturday was the PVC board meeting with a Large crowd in attendance. . At the end our president, Clyde, made a statement about vandalism in our community: money stolen from laundry machines, Water left running in the night causing damage to the drain fields, board members cars being keyed, and his own back window being shot out! Sam and I were astonished! But all eyes looked at a certain couple as they had been ousted from duties earlier this year. He mentioned what they had been dealing with all summer and simply asked that the childishness go away. We were shocked. We had no idea this was happening. But it was true. People are weird. We’re dealing with the wild west here in Georgia. Other than that, the meeting was quiet and informative.

I recently learned my favorite cousin died. I’m so thankful we visited Patty and her family in California a couple years ago. She’d been fighting serious illnesses for several years; She’s in a better place now. Patty was one year younger than I and the only cousin I had any relationship with, even though we lived a country apart. God bless you, Patty.

We Mountain Cruisers took a long ride again over the Cherohala Skyway; 11 riders on 7 bikes. We wore leathers, including chaps and snow gloves. I was snug as a bug. We went to Tellico Plains in Tennessee, had lunch at Tellico Kats, crossed the skyway again and back home. 220 miles and 8 hours. Good fun with this group.

I worked all day cleaning Helen’s cabin so friends could use it later. It was quite a mess since a sick lady stayed in it last year. Nothing had been done after she left. We found melted ice cream in the freezer and spoiled food in

the fridge. Helen had simply turned off the electric and shut the door. we cleaned it up and Sam made several repairs . So all's ready for our guests.

One evening we shared a low country boil with Lynn & Diane at their place. Sausage and shrimp with veggies and coleslaw. And a lovely visit.

Meanwhile, Kim closed on her new house in Blues Creek in Gainesville. As soon as she's able, after getting moved, she's having work done on a bad knee. Ouch.

2012 October. Karen & Floyd came back up to PVC this week. So great to see them. We sat around the fire with Patti & Roy and decided to go for a ride the next morning. After lunch at Johnny B's, we went to the Outlet Mall. Then Sam's bike wouldn't start. After much deliberation, he resigned himself to ride on Floyd's bike with him to PVC to get a trailer.

Karen and I chatted in the food court while waiting for them. She's such a lovely person and I enjoyed the time with her.

There was to be a chili cookoff at the pavilion one evening, which I hadn't even thought about. Then Sam came home from grocery shopping and brought all the makings for it. I came in second of 12 entries and won a copy of the PVC Cook Book. Pretty nice. Another day I put a new recipe together of chicken and spaghetti which we had that night. Meanwhile, Sam put slices of teriyaki flavored London broil in the dehydrator and made jerky. Doncha think we're being pretty innovative!

One day in Helen we wandered around a bit. There were all sorts of entertaining things going on. We each got a frozen yogurt and worked our way to my favorite store, the Village Peddler where we bought a big soy candle that smells like coffee espresso. uummm Delicious.

Nancy & Don came from Ohio and spent a few days with us. The little cabin next door worked out perfectly. We had the most fun with them. We went to the Hiawassee fair, to Helen and the fest hall, to Brasstown Bald and to the pumpkin patch, and just laughed our selves silly the rest of the time.

But one thing happened that tickled us for days. It was like this:

The cabin they're in is just a few feet from our rig and I'd invited them to knock on our door when they got up and around in the mornings. We could have coffee together and make plans for the day. So the first morning, just as I finished dressing, I heard three knocks. I told Sam I'd get it so he wouldn't have to jump up from what he was doing.

But no one was at the door… I commented to him that I heard a knock but no one is there. He looked out his window and said she's out by their car with the trunk open. I figured she thought we weren't up yet and was going back to their cabin. I opened our door and called for her to come in. I couldn't hear her answer so I yelled louder, Hey Nancy, come on In . We're up. C'mon up. She came over and into the rig saying she was still in her PJays. Thinking she was ready to visit, I offered coffee. We chatted for 15 or 20 minutes until Don showed up. He proclaimed that we would have to take him as he was. Huh?

He said he'd waited half an hour for Nancy to bring him some pants from the car but she never came back so he's dressed in the clothes he'd already worn two days. I didn't know what that was all about. She said she was just getting some stuff from the car when I insisted she come into our rig.

What?! "But you knocked on the door! I was just answering the door!" I wailed.

She said she had not knocked on the door at all. I was befuddled. They went back to get dressed.

That evening the subject came up again and in the midst of it Sam mentioned he'd seen her out by their car and had knocked on the window by his chair, just to say Hi.

What?! We all chimed together. You knocked on the window?! Yeh, like this. he demonstrated his knock, which sounded exactly like a knock on the door. Not only did he not realize what knock I'd originally heard, but Nancy mentioned the next morning Sam had knocked while she was digging into the car and she hadn't realized it was the same knock I'd had heard. It was a total communication malfunction. We laugh over it every time we get together.

We returned to Florida the next week for the winter. Kim immediately recruited us to help her move into her new house. I'd had a kink in my back for several weeks and was going to the backocracker as often as possible. And, our own house was so laden with dust I couldn't wait to get some cleaning done.

But somehow everything got organized, laundry finished, our house cleaned and Kim settled in her house; all in just a couple weeks.

Her place was bright and spacious. Sam hung her stuff on the walls and even made her a video inventory Of everything.

2012 November. Linda turned 65 today at Red Lobster.

One evening I had a lovely surprise. My son called to thanked me for making him a suit for cotillion when he was13: over 35 years ago! He and Haley were talking about him needing a new suit and he told her about it. Maybe she encouraged him to call But it was very sweet and gave me a warm fuzzy feeling.

We rode with L&R to lunch in High Springs. What with colds and back aches, we'd hardly ridden since returning to Florida. It was a beautiful day to get back in the saddle!

Kim got us tickets for the play White Christmas and young Sam joined us since It's his favorite holiday movie. It was fun and desserts afterward at The Outback topped it off.

2012 December. Backs are a weird thing. One day I couldn't walk. I sat on ice packs and took meds for two days. Then suddenly I was fine again. I worked in the garden and ran the vacuum indoors. I hope it's gone for good.

However, Laura in Portland, is going thru horrible muscle spasms. She was crying in pain earlier this month and friends took her to a clinic. She's not doing well. One day Something snapped and hurt her back as she reached

up to pull the trunk lid of her car down. She's had excruciating pain all week. She lives alone with two pups and can't even put food or water down for them. Her dad's on his way to help her. Thank God.

It's horrendous. Big Curt is there now helping her. They're getting along pretty well. Maybe this whole episode is meant to provide a healing of the heart. A time to attend to feelings. They've been discussing important things: like his strained relationships with every member of his family. She's intuitive, perhaps she'll get through to him.

Well, life's just one pot hole after another. My stomach hurt nearly every day in December. Every time I ate anything, within a few hours it hurt again. Shades of 2004 when this First happened. I supplemented my food intake with Lots of Pepcid A C and Alka Seltzer.

On New Years Eve with Linda & Ron I celebrated with nice sedate tea and wished everyone a Happy and HEALTHIER New Year.

2013 January. Mom and Daughter Under the Knife:

Re Mom in Florida:

My new year started with the stomach aches in the night again. Terrible pain.

Re Laura in Oregon:

Her dad is with her and she is still experiencing extreme back pain. He got her a potty chair and a better cane. She had an MRI and surgery was set for next week. Doctor set her up with lots of meds to get her through the ordeal.

And thank God, it was successful!

Re Mom: Kim spoke to a favorite surgeon in the hospital where she works. he set me up for tests that very afternoon. Evidently I have stones. Geez, is this why the stomach pains for the past 10 years?! The next day my gall bladder was removed! This was quick. I was home by 4pm that afternoon. Checkup three days later and everything was fine.

Re Laura: She had tests and surgery was scheduled. Please God, steady their hands and make it perfect. Her Dad will stay with her untill this is resolved.

Two weeks later. Her surgery went good as they shaved out a herniated disc and did something with an arthritic disc above it. All in about 45 minutes. Minimally invasive microdiscectomy and laminectomy. The next day she fixed her own breakfast and coffee. Hallelujah!

! Thank you God. (and my guardian angel too.)

2013 February. Laura's much better. she's going for a walk today.

Sam and I cleaned our yard of the winter debris and ended up working with a couple other folks to clean up the unoccupied property next door. Ellie had gone to live with family a few months earlier. . Now we're all spiffy

2013 March. we were in Georgia checking on the rig. We visited with several couples but it's just too cold to do anything outside. we left PVC Saturday evening around 8 and got home at 3 a m. I used to love traveling all night like that back in the sixties when Curt and I went from Florida to Ohio and back so many times. but it's too scary these days. Every place we stopped after dark for coffee and a potty, was overrun with big kids hanging around. The parking lots were crawling with them at 1 and 2 in the morning, panhandling and whatever. They seemed pretty rough. We shouldn't have traveled like that, especially on a Saturday night.

2013 April. Today we had a lovely 46 mile bike ride to Chiefland Fla where they were celebrating their centennial with interesting historical things going on. It was a beautiful day for it.

Nancy's Bob is doing fantastic following open back surgery. They're thrilled. What a relief.

Laura's doing well with hers also. She's working nearly every day now.

We had a fun visit with young Sam on his 18th birthday at the Blue Highway Pizza restaurant. He's excited about life and the future. Can't wait to get it going. He's going to the prom next week with a girlfriend. And He's all set to go into the marines after graduation this summer. It's always fun to spend time with him, He's so positive and busy.

Sam and I are thinking of volunteering a month or two this summer at a state park in Oregon. More on that later.

2013 May. We met with Dave & Judy at the Marjorie Kennan Rawlings home in Cross Creek, Florida. The tour of the old home and the meal at The Yearling restaurant were great; featuring alligator, cooter, frog legs, and oysters right along with hamburgers and chicken.

Our friends love to read and we exchanged all sorts of info about books and authors. We told them of reading Uncle Tom's Cabin, Robinson Crusoe, and currently Moll Flanders. And after this little tour, we'll read The Yearling and Cross Creek. It was a great day with them.

Mothers Day again. Beautiful flowers and cards and teas from David's Tea made the day. . Sam's grilling steaks and we'll have baked potatoes /sour cream, corn on the cob, and fried asparagus. And Kim's strawberry shortcake! yummy!

We now have summer plans . July and August we'll be volunteering in Oregon. I'll be able to get some time in with Laura during these gigs. More info as things unfold.

Curtiss and Haley are expecting a baby boy! Kim and I found some tiny dude duds for the new grandson coming soon in New York. We sent A hoody , long pants and short pants and tee shirt sets , onesies and blankets, all in dark blue, grey and white mix n match. Too cute. This little bundle is due to arrive in September.

2013 June. This is Young Sam's season. First the ROTC Ball at the local Hilton, then the ROTC graduation exercise and banquet. Sam performed his duties as Brigadier Commander this school year. After marching with his girlfriend, Josie, down the main aisle under a sword salute, he was up at the dais shaking hands and congratulating each cadet as they accepted their awards. He had previously received high honors from his superiors in a special awards presentation. At the finale he announced his own plan: He'd already joined the Marines and would ship out August 5th!

By the way: ROTC stands for Reserve Officers Training Corp. This boy has plans!

I'm happy we went with Kim to witness this great milestone in his life. Congratulations young Sam!

Another occasion to remember. Young Sam's High School Graduation.

Curtiss & Haley will be here for these festivities this weekend so my thoughts turned to preparing food. I made everyone's favorites; a delicious meatloaf and home made mushroom gravy and our famous pineapple cheesecake.

They arrived at the O'Connell Center just in time and somehow found us high up in the masses of people. Grandpa Curt had arrived the day before to stay at Kim's house for the weekend. After an interesting and fun two hour ceremony, we all adjourned to Satchel's for pizza.

Later that day everyone came back to the house. They loved the dinner but the peace de resistance was, once again, the pineapple cheesecake!

Note: I'm happy to say I've finally arrived at a place where I can be around big Curt and not feel the arrogance emanating off him as I have felt all these years. One of us, or maybe both of us, has changed. Or maybe it just doesn't matter any longer.

That Sunday everyone met at our community pool for a picnic and relaxation. After a cloudy morning with a few sprinkles, the sky cleared up beautifully and everyone splashed around enjoying the warm sunshine. Later, just as we head back to the house, it clouded over and gave us a good dousing. Perfect.

Monday morning most of us were at the Flying Biscuit for breakfast. We took some final group pictures and everyone went on their way. And so ended the festivities.

Now Sam and I went into overdrive preparing to leave for the mountains. Pack, organize, pack, organize and pack more. Next day drive 8 hours, arrive in PVC. Unpack, unpack, unpack… until we were exhausted.

Then we received a call that our positions in Oregon could actually begin immediately.

We Geared up again to leave asap.

Stub Stewart State Park, here we come!

Itinerary and Volunteering schedule. 2013 June thru September.

June 8 to 11 Travel PVC to Paduka-Kansas City, Mo.-North Platt, Nebraska

June 12 to 13 Travel North Platt to Rawlings, Wyoming

June 14 to 17 Travel Brigham Utah-Ontario Oregon-Tigard, Oregon

June 18 to July 31 Volunteer in Stub Stewart State Park six weeks

August 1 to 28. Volunteer Thompson's Mills State Heritage Facility, Oregon 4 weeks

Aug. 29 Thursday Travel Leave Shedd Oregon, arrive Pendleton WalMart

Aug 31 Saturday Travel arrived Boise WalMart

September 1 Sunday Travel arrive Brigham, Utah WalMart

Sept 2 Monday Travel Labor Day arrive Ruby's Inn Bryce Canyon Utah

Sept 5 Thursday Travel arrive North Rim Grand Canyon Arizona-Caleb's Springs campground

Sept 6 Friday Travel arrive Winslow, Arizona WalMart

Sept 7 Saturday Travel arrive Albuquerque New Mexico-Isleta Casino

Sept 8 Sunday Travel arrive Amarillo Texas WalMart

Sept 9 Monday Travel arrive Shawnee Oklahoma WalMart

Sept 10 Travel Tuesday arrive Branson, Missouri. Tablerock Campground

Nearly home-visit Sam's family and arrive in PVC.

From our journals:

June 8, 2013. Our first day out; leaving Georgia heading for Paduka Kentucky. Travel was pleasant. Wonderful to be on the road. But what's

that mark in the windshield? somehow we got a ding in the passenger side of the windshield. Sam put some packing tape over it in an attempt to keep it from spreading but by evening it was apparent something more would need to be done. Neither of his favorite tools, duct tape and velcro, was going to prevent a crack from spreading.

Sunday we arrived in Kansas City, Missouri At another friendly Walmart. The next morning we awoke still very tired and decided we'd been pushing too hard the past couple weeks. This wasn't worth a heart attack. A day of rest was in order. We located a park and drove to The Weston Bend State Park. Sam had driven 900 miles in two days, well out of his comfort zone. We cooked a bit, set up the awning and chairs, had a summer drink and actually camped. This was a nice respite at a beautiful state park. . I even ran a load of laundry that evening. Walmart, on the other hand, frowns on the 'moving in ' appearance in their parking lots.

Tuesday we beelined it up through Iowa and made it halfway across Nebraska. Not much to see out there from the highway but the time flew by as we listened to Daddy Long Legs by Jean Webster. We found this book on a list of 100 classics and took a chance. It was great. Tonight we landed in North Platte, Nebraska. Do I remember this from Mitchner's Centennial? I'm sure there are lots of things to see and do here but we are of the beeline mentality and just pull in to sleep and then off again in the morning. If anything note worthy happens, I'll let you know.

We're on highway 80 heading straight west. That night In North Platte was interesting. Quite a few semi tractor trailers and motor homes shared our parking lot. And a single gal on a Harley with a cat and a dog also settled down in a little pup tent. But just before dark the wind started us rocking and rolling . You couldn't help but think of all the tornados of late but nothing in the weather reports indicated anything in this area. It was weird to be rocked to sleep, but that's what happened. The next morning Sam spoke to the biker gal and she said it was nothing. She'd seen worse.

We drove another 360 miles and arrived in Wyoming. This is such wide open country with miles and miles of straight road and nothing much to

report on. Oh, we did see a field of huge windmills. And a bird actually flew right into our already wounded windshield. Didn't cause any further damage, thank goodness. But it made such a loud thump we thought we'd blown a tire or something.

We stopped to check but the tires were fine and the windshield unchanged so we continued on. A couple days later Sam was checking something and lifted the hood of the rig. Yikes! There, staring up at him was a big dead bird! Poor thing. How had he gotten in there?

Right through the grill?! geez. So that was the loud thump we heard the other day.

As we neared Laramie we were at an altitude of 8600 feet. This affects your breathing and your head. I wouldn't want to stay here very long. We spent the night at a nice little place called RV World Campground in Rawlings, Wyoming. The weather's terrific: constant breeze and NO BUGS! However, it was so dry it can cause some folks to have nosebleeds. We could feel the dryness but luckily didn't stay around long enough to experience that.

We left Rawlings for Brigham, Utah. The country up here is bleak from Nebraska through Wyoming and Utah. Crossing on highway 80 is not a comfortable or interesting way to go. It's unbelievably windy. Sometimes we slowed to just 40 mph because of the dangerous winds. Even the Semi truckerss were not going much faster. Our awnings took a beating as they pounded the sides of the rig. We stopped a couple times to check things out. It's hard to believe our early settlers crossed this area, walking alongside their wagons. They barely made 15 or 20 miles a day. We could hardly stand two days there. It's dull and dreary. just brownish ground with short stubby patches here and there. And the wind was constant! We're so lucky. We have books to listen to as we move along helping time and distance fly by. After ascending several days ,we crossed the Continental Divide:

Unlike a beautiful gap in the East, hidden in trees and beautiful foliage at the crest of a mountain, this was a wide open peak, grey and windy. Now we began the downhill trek. The streams and rivers run toward the pacific and points West rather than toward the Mississippi and points east. Eventually Some semblance of civilization began to appear and we were at Brigham Utah. We found the local Walmart and settled in for the night. The

next morning we visited Promontory Summit for a history lesson. It was here in the early 1860's that the newly laid Central Pacific Railroad, coming out of Sacramento California and being cut thru the Sierra Nevada Mountains, met the Union Pacific Railroad which was simultaniously being laid from Omaha Nebraska. Though they passed each other and each laid 200 miles of track parallelling the other, eventually it was decided that this is where they would make the connection and completely join east to west in one transcontinental railroad.

The Golden Spike commemorates this occasion. we learned of the Chinese men who lived and died at this monumental task. With thousands of men Cutting thru the western mountains using the primitive tools at hand, they sometimes progressed only eight inches a day. It's sad that in all the photos and hoopla about this monumental achievement, Not one Chinese person is represented in any of the photos or celebratory articles. Yet they were the workers that dug through those stone mountains to run the tracks. Shame on someone.

. We watched a face to face performance of a replica coal burning engine from the West as it met with a replica steam engine from the east. Also interesting is that in just 21 years following the opening of this railroad, the western frontier had disappeared. A six month trip was now completed in six days and suddenly everyone wanted to go west.

Our next stop was a spacious Oregon Walmart with lots of big rigs nearby. Saturday was beautiful. Gone are the flat, windy, boring landscapes. Now everything is green and lush. Soon we were riding right along the Columbia River on a shelf cut out of the rock just for us. It's a beautiful ride with a sheer rock wall on our left and Mount Hood standing tall in front of us. Our road follows the gentle curves of the river as we inhale the wonderful air in this canyon. It's luscious. Sam eagerly anticipates the sight of the Gorge where there will be hundreds of wind surfers having a blast on the water.

This Gorge is world renowned for its high winds and wonderful surfing… but Alas, No one is here today! There's no air flow whatsoever . Not one surfer. We'll definitely come back another day.

We drove on to Portland and selected a parking spot in the Wood Village shopping center. We hope to get our windows replaced at a recommended

shop here. Yes, I said windows! This morning Sam discovered the other glass is cracking exactly across the center post from the first one. They are two separate sheets of glass. It's weird. It had not been there in all these days of travel, but it must be related somehow . Thank goodness the insurance people said it would be added on to the claim they're already working on with no additional charges.

We're in an elegant shopping area with some excellent restaurants. Laura came to our parking lot just as we got settled and we all went to a cute local diner for dinner. Great to see her after two years. She delivered a Father's Day card Kim had sent to her to give Sam. Then she handed him one from herself. How nice of them. He was touched. She also brought us a big tiramisu. We went to Godfather's Pizza and had a fun time as she regaled us with stories of her clients. She's been working for some time now with adults with mental disabilities. And she's thrilled. She helps slightly mentally challenged folks dealing with daily affairs: like getting to doctors or shopping or even to movies or social engagements. She enjoys this work and finds humor in it daily. I believe she's found her niche.

Now, another wrinkle in our saga: waiting for the other windshield to arrive.

We drove our maimed rig to our new temporary home, Stub Stewart State Park. Wow. This is beautiful. Our site, in fact all the sites, are large and comfortable. We walked around our loop and on down to a pretty meadow between the two loops. Here's a play yard for children and a meeting hall and an amphitheater. It was bright, sunny and comfortably cool. We noticed a trailhead along the way and when we stepped into the trees we realized this particular trail was also a disc golf course. What fun! In 1900 this part of Oregon was a forest of trees 300 to 600 years old. Then the area became populated with lumber mills for about 50 years. Since these woods are not on any waterway, they used rail cars to move lumber to the mill. Those 6 foot wide railways which were already cleared and smooth, are now perfect trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding.

2013 Mid June. Stub Stewart State Park.

We’re settling in. work starts tomorrow. We had a brief lesson regarding our duties in the Discovery Depot/the Welcome Center. We met the ten other couples who help run this park at the monthly pot luck dinner they have for themselves. They seem nice. Most of them have volunteered here many times. We think we’ll enjoy it here.

one week later: Doing well at the Depot. I chat with folks about the park and lizzie the Alligator Lizard. She’s about 10 inches long and lives in an aquarium. We also have a 183 pound cougar. He’s stuffed.

During slow time I’ve been folding trail maps which are distributed throughout the park. You can never have too many folded and ready to go. Sam takes care of the terminal; opening, ringing transactions and closing. He loves that stuff. In fact before long he had revamped the entire system to include all items carried in the depot.

Laura and I had several days together in which we got pedicures, had lunch, and went to Macy's and bought a Magic Bullet for Sam’s birthday. This thing grinds coffee beans, chops veggies and even makes milk shakes. He’ll love it . Then we hit the grocery store and back to her place. She cooked up a delicious meal for us. This morning when Sam came to pick me up, she made chicken quesadillas while he fixed one of her ceiling fans. The other day he repaired her disposal. Good guy to keep around.

We worked the Depot 5 days that week. Then we met Laura at the Olive Garden and she brought me a lovely landscape she’d painted. I didn’t realize she’d taken up painting. It was very pretty and looked great in the rig.

Cannon Beach on the coast is a great little Oceanside village chock full of shops, restaurants and cafes. more storefronts and tons of colorful flowers line every little alleyway. It’s adorable. All walks lead to the beach. And The beach itself is a surprise… Once you step into that deep, soft sand you’re in for quite a workout. And all along the shore tall rocks jut up out of the water. They’re famous landmarks, The most prominent one being called Haystack. the sand here is light brown whereas Florida’s is white, and We have no boulders in the water.

2013 July. Well, we're broken in now. We worked 13 of the past 16 days. Sam completely bar coded every item in the store. I'm a whiz at folding maps and brochures and yakking with folks about the wonders of our park. We're enjoying all of it. When we got a three day weekend off . We rode to Forrest Grove for hair cuts. Laura came by early and we went to the Pioneer Museum at Vernonia. It was most interesting with all sorts of tools, photos, an ancient dentist chair run by a foot pedal, and a wonderful curator who walked us thru all of it. We had a delayed 4th of July cookout. It was nice to have her spend the night and both the pups were very well behaved. It wasn't their fault Sam stepped on the potty pad full of puppy pee! Was it?

Most days are quiet at the depot so I took my computer with me a couple times and worked on these notes. One day we made a switcharoo: Sam went with Ken on the Gator to clean the Vernonia Trail with the big blower while I worked in the Discovery Depot with Bonnie. She's talkative And had loads of facts and ideas to share with visitors. I gained a wealth of info to pass on to visitors.

Another day Sam & I started out to see something or other and ended up at Laura's house messing around all day. She was in a funk over a guy she'd been hopeful about who had proved himself a loser. It's so disappointing when you think someone is really great and he turns out all wrong. But she takes no gaff from anyone and he was soon out on his ear!

While we ran errands Sam cleaned her computer up and showed her a few things she was unaware of.

The three of us rode to Astoria and visited the Columbia River Maritime Museum. We wandered around in a ship they refer to as "the little red boat." This was actually a floating lighthouse With a crew of 17 men, anchored at a specific point out at sea. This was part of our Coast guard's safety and rescue operations. It was chock full of things to learn. We topped the day off with my spaghetti, Laura's salad and some wonderful bread. She left for home the next morning and we spent a couple quiet days with our books and computers.

Everything is routine at the Depot during the week. Friday we were off work and stayed around the rig relaxing. Saturday morning we picked Laura up

and went to Mount Hood and to the Hood River Brewery for lunch. We rode the Salmon River Road which had been recommended by visitors in the Depot. A beautiful four mile drive in the woods. Tons of folks parked at each trailhead and disappeared into the thicket. After lunch we sat outside on the grassy bank watching the windsailing. Today the gorge was jumping with activity. It takes a lot of energy but is so pretty once everyone is up, sliding along on top of the water. Sam ran around with his GoPro filming the surfers and kiters.

Thus our gig in the depot quietly came to an end.

But first:

After haggling three weeks with the glass and the insurance companies, we finally had a date. We drove the rig back to the Speedy Glass place to get it done. However, another hitch … once both plates of glass were removed, they realized The strip of metal between them was rusted through and completely broken. In fact, the rust from that post is what caused the glass to crack. Who knew that could even happen? This post is not an item you can get off the shelf. It will have to be made and shipped to us. so we may be sitting here with no windshield for three weeks?! Well, that can't happen either! . Gads. Will this ever end?

Finally, a decision was made. they put the new glass in with the old post super glued in place!

By this time we'd learned It's the super glue that holds the glass in place, not the outside trim or the center post or any of those tin trimmings . So Sam told them to install the new glass using the rotten old post with lots and lots of super glue. Note: We drove that rig 10more years with no problem. and it's now a friend's man cave and the windows are still perfect.

Before we move on, here's a bit of Oregon history:

Many years ago a couple investors from Maine flipped a coin to see which name would be used for two new towns in Oregon. As we know, Mr. Portland won the toss for the northern town and Mr. Boston won the southern town. The new Boston was located in the Willamette valley, about 80 miles south of Portland. Boston Mills was built in 1858 and is known today as Thompson's Mills. The town of Boston didn't survive after a train station was built just a mile away. A new settlement sprang up around that train depot an the new Boston was deserted. This new town was named Shedd Station after Captain Frank Shedd. Today it's known simply as Shedd, Oregon.

Moving on to our next assignment, we are now in southern Oregon at Thompsons Mills. Built in 1858, this mill was still in service over 160 years later. The amazing thing is, it's located in a huge flat dry valley, yet is operated by water power. Mills are usually on a mountainside where water has the force to power them. It's history is impressive. This mill has been operating continuously all these years. Several years ago Oregon state took it over and continue to use it to produce electricity for the state.

We were pleasantly surprised as we pulled in to a nice farmyard with Chickens, roosters and turkeys roaming around. There was a beautiful, old, Queen Anne style home on the drive in and the mill stood just ahead. No one was around but Sam had been told where to park the rig behind a wooden privacy fence across the street from the mill, in an area of our own.

we walked to the Mill to meet anyone there and find out what we were getting ourselves into. WE were just in time to witness the 2 o'clock tour. Gads, it took an hour and 40 minutes. I was overwhelmed. It was exhausting just listening to the guide. I've never spoken in front of a crowd and didn't think I could do this.

You can bet our show will be much quicker than that was!

Huh. Famous last words.

Part of the tour takes place in the cellar where the big turbines that run the whole shebang are located. It's dark and ugly down there so I let Sam handle that part. Tomorrow we'll listen to another person's rendition of it. Then we'll figure out what we'll do and say when we give the tours. I'm tired already just reading and thinking about it.

Friday we got groceries in nearby Lebanon. I made beefaroni in the electric skillet But I was so tired and anxious I lay down at 7:15 and slept all night. Better now.

This morning another ranger showed us around the grounds. There were roaming turkeys and ducks, and we visited the chicken coops. We can collect all the eggs we can use.

He showed us the out buildings, the garden and the public facilities for visitors. We learned about the security system. We met Bucky the cat, a bona fide employee of the state who lives here and keeps the varmints under control. He walked around with us just like a person.

I did my part of the spiel one morning for a small group, and it went pretty well.

While meeting some folks outside, I covered all the introductory history. Then while standing there next to a turbine I explained how a water turbine works. Most visitors don't know anything about them and were very interested. Then we all went inside where Sam did the rest of the tour. He worked the machinery in the mill and down in the cellar. It still took over 90 minutes.

Later that afternoon another group arrived and I did my spiel again. It was fine.

Sam's great doing this stuff. He loves it. But speaking in front of people is new to me. I prefer one on one conversations. But I'm getting better and it's fun explaining this to folks who are genuinely interested. One very sweet older couple was from the coast. we had a good time with them and we went over the mountain to the coastal city of Florence where they live. This little town at the mouth of the river has lots and lots of restaurants, cafes and shops. We saw many unique items for sale: like the beautiful bells made of oxygen tanks: About two feet tall and 10 inches across with a long clapper inside, They're beautifully painted , each one unique. You could hang one or two or three together as yard art. Another store was full of

wooden items and we spent quite a while with some fantastic hand made flutes. We came dangerously close to buying one. The minimum cost was well over a hundred bucks. We went next door for an ice cream cone while we thought about it. A pleasant day.

At the rig the next morning I had my coffee out by the fire as Sam made his favorite Spanish Bean soup. We're off today relaxing and catching up with emails and such. We went to Portland and after lunch at Burgerville, Sam dropped me off at Laura's. She and I had two nights and all day Friday to goof around.

The weather was good and we enjoyed our time at Macy's and out to dinner with her friends.

Saturday morning she drove us south again to the rig, with the pups, and stayed overnight. She caught the 2 o'clock tour of the Mill and was duly impressed. We cooked out and watched a funny movie. Early Sunday morning she and the pups left for home.

Kim's worried and depressed over young Sam's leaving for the marines without getting in touch with her. We chatted for quite a while and I hope I helped her a bit. Actually ,young Sam's living his dream and not too concerned with Mommy and Daddy back home. He'll probably not ever really be home again. Another major change in the cycle of life.

One day at nearby Albany we heard of the Carousel which we had to go see. The town is building a Merry Go Round from the bottom up. We visited the building where volunteers are carving and whittling and painting and assembling parts of all the animals. It's a 15 year project now in its 10th year.

Some of the horses and other whimsical animals are completely assembled and beautifully painted. It's fascinating. They're gorgeous. In another

building volunteers already assembled the mechanics of the carousel so it's on target for it's unveiling in a few years.

Good news; Kim received a letter from her Sam. She was so relieved and excited. He's doing well at boot camp but it's harder than he expected. Meanwhile, we've finished our commitment at the Mills. The 29th was our last day. We had a pizza party at our rig. Tom Parsons, the Ranger in charge, brought pizzas and beer. It was fun. We pulled out the next morning to head home. We had hoped to travel to Reno and several points southwest but there's so many huge fires out that way the air is filled with smoke. And now even Yosemite is on fire!

While heading East along the Columbia River, a couple police cars screamed past us doing over a hundred mph. Wow! Sam remarked. Guess we'll come up to the trouble soon. Then the highway came to a complete halt. Sam got his CB radio and the binoculars out. From the roof of the rig he figured we were 20 vehicles back from an accident. Then the CB came alive: "officer down! three bodies Dead in the road! a shoot out up there! a standoff! "

About 20 police cars had converged but when the ambulances wanted through, all the traffic was squashed aside. The ambulances were gone with the highway patrolmen. Wow, that was exciting! The wild west lives!

Pendleton Oregon. We drove on to see the Chinese Underground. We were unaware of this part of America's history several years ago when we were here, learning of it just recently. An interesting but sad part of our history.

Pendleton is unique, to say the least. It was a wild west settlement back when it was considered the end of the Oregon trail. Most travelers were tired and disheartened by the time they got here. Many decided they'd gone far enough. It was lush and beautiful and they were ready to settle down. Today it's a nice town with stores full of western gear from feed bags to clothes , boots and saddles. In September they have a huge festival; the states primo rodeo called Roundup Week. People and their horses pour into

town by the thousands. All quite ready for a stiff drink. Evidently they come by this urge naturally. Originally Pendleton had 34 saloons and 18 brothels. It was a shootem up town for sure.

. After browsing awhile we made our way to the Working Gals Hotel where our tour of the Chinese Underground was about to begin. We knew the Chinese had been tricked into coming to America. They were told you could pick gold up right off the streets of San Francisco. Of course, when they arrived there was no such gold. Not only no gold, but no Chinese women or children were allowed in America! Their families had no money to return home so they were sent on to Canada. Like the American natives and black people, these men were treated like animals. They were hard workers, as proven by the Great Wall of China. They were put to the most difficult tasks. Besides laying 90% of the western train lines, which went inch by inch through the mountains in California, using the most rudimentary of tools, the Chinese were made to dig and build these tunnels in the new town of Pendleton. They were never allowed to be outside after dark, so they carved a place below ground for themselves to spend the nights. We saw one room that slept 35 men. It had kerosene lamps and very little ventilation. It seems when our forefathers were about to build this city, they did some masterful planning. This was to be a party town, a celebration, the end of the long trail.

Hence all the saloons and brothels. They figured folks having fun should not be interrupted with mundane things like delivery wagons and business of any type on the streets. Before any buildings above ground were constructed, they had a maze of rooms dug right out of the ground for The workers. Twenty square blocks, underground, for businesses and living quarters for the workers. A German family had a system of slaughtering meat and slicing it for the citizenry. They’re credited with giving the folks good, healthy protein in their diets for many years. We saw where there had been two bowling lanes and a billiard hall down there . We visited Hop Sings bath house and laundry: a cowpoke coming to town after several months on the range would not be allowed into a brothel until he visited Hop Sings place. There he could bathe in fresh water for ten cents. If he was the second one using the water it cost nine cents and so on down to a penny. Hop Sing and his crew also took care of much of the laundry for the city. The Chinese, including Hop Sing, spoke no English. He had devised a way to keep track of the laundry so patrons got their own clothes back.

Our underground tour continued to an area where, during prohibition, men went to play cards and drink. We saw the bullet holes in the door where someone didn't know the latest password and tried to get in. These doors were guarded and when someone rapped on it, the guard would say "speak easy", listen for the correct word and either let them in… or not. They didn't want the next person to hear the secret word. We went on to an opium den where about 16 beds fit all around the room. All these rooms were in a dark cellar with little ventilation or light. .

Then our tour was outside on the sidewalk. We entered a pretty doorway to an opulent staircase. As we went up the steps, we tripped a soft warning signal. . So by the time a cowboy got to the top he was greeted by the Madam.

If he was dirty or whatever, he was sent to Hop Sing's for a bath. If he passed inspection she took his money and directed him to a small room where he could interview with three girls and make his choice. The chosen one would take him across the hall to her own working room. This brothel was the very best in a nice building. We went into the girls chapel where we learned about Stella Darby.

Miss Darby was a most beloved madam for over 50 years. She took care of her girls with medical attention, life skills education and her goal was always to find them a husband and a good life. These girls were paid fifty% of the charges whereas in other brothels they received only about 20%. Stella used most of her part of the income to help people in town in any way she could. She often allowed girls with no money to select a dress for prom or even to be married in. When necessary she even paid to have alterations done. We browsed through some of the working rooms and a couple of the girls own private rooms. They were cozy and nicely furnished. In the end, a reverend minister made arrangements for all the brothels in town to be raided one evening. Stella and her girls fled out a window, across a roof, down a ladder and away. They left all their furnishings, photos and personal things right where they are today. The girls had scattered but Miss Darby came back and continued to work quietly helping the young ladies of the town. She was well known, loved and respected.

2013 September. Bryce Canyon and the Upper Rim.

We spent three days crossing Idaho and Utah. A good time to listen to a book. Finally we reached Ruby's Inn and RV Campground just a mile from Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah. This Park has been on our bucket list ever since we heard about it several years ago. Now here we are. We got settled in by mid afternoon just as the sky began to put on a good thunder and lightening show. until finally it rained. After three days we've learned this is a regular feature of the area. One very cool morning we went into the park, collected all the necessary maps and info, and hopped onto a shuttle bus to our first destination, Inspiration Point.

We walked a little path up to the overlook. As we stood by a railing at the edge of this awesome canyon, we were definitely inspired. The panorama before us was spectacular.

When it was time to go to the next sight we decided not to go back to the bus pick up, but opted to walk along the rim to the next viewing point. Now there was no low railing to lean against. In fact, there was no rail or wall or fence of any kind. You just walk along a wide stone and sand path and look out at the hoodoos standing down there. As you move along in the bright sunshine, every now and then there's a straggly little tree or two offering a bit of shade. The ground is smooth and the walkway wide along here with occasional paths back to the road. It was less then a mile to the next point and each step presented a new scene along the way. Sunset Point was an oasis; trees and shade. several large stone paths met here and there were folks milling around comfortably. We drifted over to a gal Ranger giving an interesting talk about the geology of this area. One thing she explained was how the canyon grows from year to year. Pointing to a post implanted in the walkway at the very edge of the canyon, she explained that Twenty years ago when she began working there, this post was set more than 3 feet from the edge. With their calculations they can figure how much the wall erodes in a century. Of course there are sometimes rockslides and such that change the rim but general erosion is constant. We spent quite a while with her, listening and learning. Then we continued on our way at the rim- but not too close to it -to our next destination, Sunrise Point.

Every step of the way up here was awesome, but we were getting hungry and the sun was hot. We were ready for something to eat and drink. There's a little market nearby so we left the rim and trekked down to the

store. This was too good to be true…they had soft ice cream! We sat on the cool porch with our goodies and made further plans. Before leaving the park that afternoon, we signed up for the next morning's tour to the southern end of the canyon, which is also the highest point at 9,150 feet. We're experiencing the effects of being at 8000 feet altitude but, oh well, what's another thousand? As luck would have it though, when we got up there the next morning, another thunder, lightening and rain show was in progress so it was cancelled. Back to the other viewing points where it was sunny. We hopped off at the nearby market, got a hot dog, and went in search of The Queen's Garden Trail.

This would take us to the bottom of the canyon where we could stand right next to a hoodoo. Did I hear someone ask what's a hoodoo? Well, I was wondering also, so let me tell you what we've learned: from up above they look like statues scattered around in the bottom of the canyon. Bryce Canyon is the only place in the world that has these hoodoos. They are a formation of the rock that happens on certain fault lines and under precise conditions. They are a natural phenomenon. Even the geological explanation does not explain it as far as I can tell, but there it is. The local legend is that the coyotes turned some Indians to stone way back when. To look down at them from the rim you would have no idea that some of them are 50 feet tall. I wanted to get up close and personal. So we headed down the trail. Again, just a dirt and stone trail with no sides and a thousand foot drop off. At least there were no pot holes or tree roots or rocks to stumble over, thank goodness. I was surprised to see families with children out here. It was very steep in some places. We went down, down, down. A sharp turn here and down More. Look way down there, real people look like ants. Take pictures, think of how in the world you're going to get back up, slip on loose stone, keep going down. We got near to a hoodoo but couldn't actually stand by it because of a ditch between it and us. Just one more sharp turn and we'll be near one. Down, down. Finally we learned from returning hikers that we were only about half way down. We didn't like the possibilities of getting back up without the help of a helicopter. So we turned back. Oh my goodness, this is steep. Huffinand puffin all the way.

we did it! We stopped each time we met a bit of shade to stand in and rest until our pulsating eased. This is no place for a heart attack. It sure was an adventure though. We made it back to the info center and watched the movie about the park and its history. By then we felt we'd experienced Bryce Canyon as completely as we needed to. On to another adventure!

Days later at The North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

We left Bryce Canyon for the North Rim via highway 89. a total of 110 miles or so. I mention this because some years ago we traveled 89 from the south part of the Grand Canyon to Zion and I was amazed at the miles and miles of desolate desert between the two places. This 89-A is different...

We rode through one canyon after another, between beautiful huge rock walls, way up high and down into valleys. The whole trip could have been a State Park, it was lovely. I wish we could spend several months here in Utah and just visit everywhere.

We came to the turnoff to the North Rim. This 45 mile highway goes directly to the rim. After visiting, you come back this way to continue on your trip. Shortly after turning here we saw Caleb Springs Campground and it looked very inviting. We left the rig there and drove onto the rim by car. Let me add here that with a Golden Access card we saved the $25 entrance fee into the park. This is the case throughout the country. Anyone Over 65 or disabled folks can get into National Parks free.

We were surprised at the activities here. A thick woods had large cabins and a nice lodge/information center scattered among the trees. Many trailheads met at this road. I think we did the best of the trails; Bright Angel Point Trail. It was smooth and mostly about three feet wide as it descended down and out into the canyon to an observation point. We were on a long, sometimes narrow peninsula about a mile high at the point. Again it was steep in some places and most of the way had a high wall of rock on one side with a drop off on the other. Lots of folks passed us as they returned from the point. Now and then was a little shade where the wall was high enough to create a shadow. On the way back we stopped several times to catch our breath. Thank you Guardian Angels for going with us on these wonderful walks. Back at the rig we had a bite of meatloaf with a salad and rewarded ourselves with a Klondike from the campground trading post. Another perfect day.

The next day we got back on 89-A heading south. It took us all the way around the Grand Canyon, Eventually crossing the Colorado River which had taken the shortcut thru the canyon. Now we were south of it. It was awesome riding along out there with all the rock formations and hills and valleys. We arrived at Winslow Arizona for the night. 108degrees. No matter what they say: That's HOT!

The next day as we traveled to Albuquerque, Straight across the country on highway 40, I worked on my journals while Sam drove and listened to a book. That night we stayed at a new Indian Casino, the Isleta. After parking the rig in the huge, practically empty lot, We wandered to the casino intending to deposit 10bucks each into their machines to justify parking there overnight. We'd pay our dues and then go into the quaint Old Town for some real Mexican food. Since we've never been to one of these modern casinos we searched out help in getting started. We registered and each received 25 bucks to gamble with! we could donate our own rolls of quarters after we blew through the 25. Well, after an hour or so, instead of losing we'd racked up another 50 bucks each, using their money! We cashed out. we had a lovely Mexican dinner alfresco in town. Thank you Isleta.

However, the night in that parking lot wasn't so great. By 3am several semi tractor trailers had crowded around us running their generators and passing gas everywhere. Well, we generally sleep with open windows whenever possible. Now our lovely breeze was noxious gas. Yuk. We looked around and trucks were practically touching our rig on both sides. Guess they thought they were being cute. We fired up and got the hail out of there!

we completed our 300 miles and landed in Shawnee, Oklahoma by noon. That evening we changed our plans for the umpteenth time, scratching the Graceland and Nashville idea. Instead we headed back to Branson. So Tuesday found us at our favorite spot in Table Rock State Park. We'd approached from a different highway this time and I realized Table Rock is a huge lake with all sorts of parks and campgrounds and marinas around it. And many of them have the words Table Rock in their name; Table Rock this and Table Rock that. Ours is the lovely state park with spacious sites and lots of trees. We rested that afternoon and went to The Branson Belle dinner showboat that evening . It was unbelievable! Dinner was excellent And the show was fabulous. First, four guys did some excellent harmonizing. They

continued to do backup throughout the show. But we were totally amazed at a girl named Janice Martin. She played the violin and the piano and she sang a hair raising rendition of Amazing Grace. Her finale was an Ariel act as in Circ de So lay with the violin attached to her shoulder in such a way as to play it while swinging and doing acrobatics! All the performers were excellent... but she was unbelievable.!

Next stop: Georgia. After an overnight in Tupelo Mississippi, we arrived in Paradise Valley just in time for dinner at Roy & Patti's cabin. A nice reunion meal with Floyd & Karen, Dwight & Donna, Dean & Cindy, and Mike & Carol. Lots of laughs and fun. So good to see everyone .

That evening at the pot luck at our club house we feasted again with half the park. Sunday, laundry and more work in the yard. Monday a bunch of us rode bikes to Hogsed sporting goods store in NC. Then lunch at Chevelle's, a favorite of our group. We always sit at a long table on their covered porch. We never realized the porch roof was tin. Nor did we know a huge chestnut tree hung innocently overhead. As it happened, this was chestnuts falling off the trees season. Every minute or two a big one would fall on that tin roof making the loudest noise you could imagine. Each time one fell, everyone jumped in surprise and we all laughed. As we were leaving I suggested we all pick up some chestnuts so we could roast them over an open fire one evening. And later, one cool evening, with Nat Cole singing his song, we did that.

We took June & Sid to lunch at the Café International one day. They live here year round and had never been to this restaurant nor tasted our favorite sandwich there, the Reuben. Of course they loved it. Friday we did another ride; this time with Ed & Sharon and Roy. Patty was away visiting family. We went to Blue Ridge for lunch and fried apple pies.

Tuesday, Sept 24, 2013. Grey James Venn was born at 3:55 this morning. He weighed 7 pounds 15 oz and was perfect! They came home on

Thursday and are doing fine. That Monday Curtiss and Haley celebrated their 7th anniversary, making note of all they had to be happy for this year.

One evening a bunch of us went to Tallulah Falls Opry House for some pickin & grinnin music. A fun way to round out the month.

2013 October . All kinds of plans buzz through our minds these days. When will we get to see Baby Grey and what are our plans for young Sam's graduation from boot camp and can we see Rita & Jim while we're up that way?? Meanwhile, leaves are falling in droves around here. I've cleaned Helen's cabin again. This time for my brother's visit next week. All the gardens have been cleaned out. Ed & Sharon are here for the month, riding with us whenever possible

. Sam & I went to the fest hall one Sunday afternoon and to the Georgia Mall another day. We ordered some things for Baby Grey: a baby spoon and fork, a baby book for his parents to fill out, and an outfit for Thanksgiving Day. Grey's already been out and about in New York City to see his doctor and ride the subway. Curtiss loves to take him places in his Papoose where he rides right against his Daddy's heart.

And his Daddy loves having him there!

We've had several rides with parts of our group lately. One was to Johnny B's in Dahlonega and up to Burt's Farms where we adopted a scarecrow and a pumpkin. We have just a couple more weeks here to ride in these hills.

To my surprise, Sam is making serious noises about leaving the bike in Florida next year. And he's considering trading the Jeep in for a smaller car for riding around these mountain roads.

I think he's had enough of organizing the rides and tired of driving the bike. It wears him out. . We both prefer riding alone or with just one other couple. It's tiresome constantly being concerned about everyone behind him. It seems all our friends feel it necessary to have an entire entourage along wherever they go. Well, we'll see how it plays out. I'll go along with

whatever he wants, as long as he feels comfortable and confident. Things are aChanging. …

Oh dear. We may have ostracized ourselves from the group. Here's what happened:

Sam and I planned all week to see Brenda Lee at the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. We looked forward to going there early, on our own , wandering around the grounds, eating the junk food and getting to the hall early enough to secure a seat up front so I could see Little Miss Dynamite. Then everyone started making plans for a group lunch at a restaurant beforehand , assuming we'd do that also, and get to the festival later. As we were getting ready that morning Sam suggested we go ahead and do our own thing. We could run into them at the fair but we'd do it as we'd planned. We did get primo seats and they ended up way back in the auditorium. Afterward, they all went off to browse around and we came home. We don't know if they missed us or not but we really enjoyed our day together and seeing Brenda Lee up close.

My brother Mick, & Mo arrived one afternoon. They'll use Helen's cabin while visiting the area. It's great to see them. Using Becka's gulf cart we showed off our campground and visited some of our neighbors. Sam cooked a turkey in the trashcan and we had a super nice pre Thanksgiving dinner. The weather was perfect for sitting around by the fire.

One day we took them to Helen for the Reuben sandwiches and then drove all around so they could get a feel for the area. We brought home fried apple pies for the next morning's breakfast. It was a super nice, laid back visit and they moved on to a few days in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I'm glad they finally got to see where we spend our summers .

The next couple weeks were pretty calm. We rode the bike a bit, had friends over for dinner, went to the Unicoi Lodge and to the Holly Theater to see Agatha Christie's Mousetrap which was fabulous.

We began planning one last excursion before heading to Florida for the winter. Young Sam was about to be graduated from boot camp at Camp LeJeune at Paris Island and become a full fledge marine. We wanted to be there so we headed up to Rita & Jim's in South Carolina for a few days while waiting to pick Kim up at the Charleston airport. While there we caught a horse & buggy tour through the city and we walked around Charleston quite a bit . Then one morning we all stood along a curb in the camp and watched as the grads participated in a fun run. We had time with young Sam as he showed us around the island. We must have walked 5 miles as he expounded on all his activities during the past 13 weeks. His dad and grandmother were there along with some high school buddies, so he had quite an audience.

The actual graduation exercise was impressive. We watched the morning flag raising as the Marine Marching Band played a medley of hair raising patriotic songs. All 8 battalions of Company B marched thru their drills and the Secretary of the Navy spoke to us. He was very Patriotic as he delivered a terrific speech! I felt proud of these young people and of all our service men and women.

2013 November. Arriving home in Gainesville after all these months, we were exhilarated and exhausted. One day at the downtown art festival Kim found a neat print of a tiger that she'll hang on a wall near her kitty's climbing pole. A perfect place. I bought a small bush to use in place of my scraggly artificial Christmas tree. When Linda came by the other day she helped me get the Poinsettias up on the wall over the credenza and to light the little bush so I'm all set for the holiday.

2013 December O2. Linda's nephew, Our young friend Jason, passed away today. This is so very sad.

I spoke with her and she seemed to be doing alright. Jason was the closest to being her own child as anyone could be. What a sad thing.

Christmastime already. Kim told me she had everything done at her house except her rethomedor.. .Your what?! I asked. You know, she said, my wreath on my door. So we put a new rethonmydor on my new red front door also. Then I got all my Holiday stuff sorted and taken to the Hospice Attic for sale. Some other folks will love my villages and skating pond and other decor I'm done with.

One day as Sam and I were heading to a deli to meet Linda, I fell down the five stone steps at the entrance! Thank goodness I was holding Sam's arm with my left hand but I had my phone in my right one and just clutched it harder and harder instead of letting it go to grab the handrail. Sam thought a ramp was coming up and didn't even notice steps until we were underway. he grabbed me and hung on, keeping me from flying face first as we both tumbled down. He was trying with all his might to stop us. The whole way to the bottom he kept saying "Down! Down! Down! I kept thinking Yes I'm going down, I'm going down, I can't help it, I'm going down!

Every time we think of this potential disaster we end up laughing. It's amazing how fast something like that happens. This is a fear I have of being out with folks not experienced in helping someone who doesn't see well.

Holiday activities: Kim went with us to see Scrooge at the Hippodrome. I was crying like a baby by the end of it and still laughing at his antics. What a wonderful performance. Then we went to Francesca's for their delicious veal parmesan. Good evening.

Christmas dinner at Kim's was sweet. Alex, young Sam and their Grandpa Big Curt were there, along with me, my Sam and Kim. It was a nice get together. Dinner was topped off with… what else? Birthday Cake!

Sam was tickled with his Christmas present; a cast iron poker for use at his fire pit up in Paradise Valley. For me he bought a Victor Reader Stream: a book reader, recorder, mp3 player, and whatever.

It’s as small as a cell phone yet easy to work. It’ll be great for me, especially as a reader and note taker. I love it. Thank you Sam. I love you!!

we went to Yamato’s Restaurant with L & R again and the salmon was excellent. Finished it off the next day for lunch. Yummy.

The next three days were rainy and cold and we buried ourselves in our computers and books. And as usual, slept through any seasonal festivities.

Happy New Year All!

2014 January.

Movies, movies, movies. Good morning to a happy new year! What’s better on cold dank winter days than going to the movies? we took in two terrific movies: Saving Mr. Banks and Philomena were both well worth the popcorn.

Mr. Banks is the story of Walt Disney making the movie Mary Poppins. The author of the book had her own idea of how it should be done. She was very English and demanding. But Disney had other ideas.

Philomena ; about a 66 year old woman whose child was taken from her when she was a teen and the baby was just 2 or 3. Now Philomena finally tells someone about the horrible ordeal and wants desperately to find her boy, who would have just turned 50. Great movie.

We’ve also seen two others: In Nebraska an old man thinks he has a winning Million dollar ticket, and in The Dallas Buyers Club a man fights for medicines for aids victims. good, award winning acting.

The weather's hammering the country with a vengeance. Sub zero temperatures everywhere. Florida's supposed to get some 20 degree readings in the next couple days.

Laura had a nice 49th birthday. She and girlfriend Carrie did a movie and dinner the day before and her coworkers and clients planned a party for Monday after work. So she had a fun week.

Sam and I are having fun with the old music he brings up on the computer. He downloads entire albums of any artist we think of and every album they ever released is available. It's amazing. And to think how we started out buying a single little record with one song on it! Now we can access everything Ever recorded! We've expanded to every genre we're interested in and Thoroughly enjoy all of It. This is especially great since watching TV has lost most of its allure for me these past years.

I chatted with Bettie, a favorite coworker, and with my old neighbor, Jane, for quite a while and got caught up on their families, the neighborhood, and my house in Sarasota.

2014 February. had a nice time with L & R last week when we rode together to Stump Knockers for lunch. We sat outdoors on the deck overlooking the bend in the river watching folks playing around in their small crafts. Very pleasant, a fun afternoon.

Sunday morning Sam and I rode to Silver Springs in Ocala. Another pretty day. In between these nice days it grows cold and dank. That's our latest least favorite word; dank. Lots of dank days lately.

Valentine's Day was interesting. . Much as we didn't need it, Sam brought us each a small heart of candy the evening before. Only Five pieces each, but We both ate all five pieces within 20 minutes. That should have been sufficient, right? But then Valentine's morning he gave me a super sized heart full of more chocolates. Now, really, do we need this? We WERE trying so hard to lose weight! And to top it off, that evening we went to Paisano's Pizza with Kim and Alex. Yeesh!

The next day in Lake City we Watched a reenactment of a war battle, Confederates verses Yankees. But it was just too darn cold to stay for the parade and the art show.

2014 March. Spring Fling. In like a lamb. Finally a nice day.

Linda and I went to Macy's to browse. She needed brown shoes and found a real steal on some Coach loafers. I bought colorful summer slingbacks and a pair of brown loafers for myself. The multi ones had a touch of turquoise in them and I ended up with turquoise denim Capris to go with the shoes. A couple weeks later Kim, Sam and I were in the store again, this time to shop for the new 45 pound lighter Kim. She found all sorts of spring things. She looks great. I'm thrilled for her.

We had a good ride with L & R Sunday. Heading south we rode past the beautiful horse ranches near Ocala and ended up at The Yearling at Cross Creek for lunch. This old restaurant is near Marjorie Kennon Rawlings home. The food's great, including good old Florida fare such as frog legs. We tried to get Ron to have some gator tail but he wouldn't try it. Linda had only one little nugget. Sam and I had to eat the rest. Poor us.

Many bikers enjoy this countryside ride to indulge themselves in this old Florida fare. Of course they also have burgers, fries and such.

Last Friday Sam rode with some biker friends to Daytona for the start of bike week. It was freezing that morning but he was excited to go. I was excited to stay home, snug as a bug.

Recently he was in charge of music for our very first Spring Fling. Many hours went into conferences with our new activities committee. They did the decorating but making a playlist of songs on the computer was quite a challenge. But it was a total success. The clubhouse was colorfully decorated and we broke in the dance floor right off the bat. It didn't take long for it to fill up. Previously, with live bands, only 2 or 3 couples ever danced. This evening everyone had a blast and the Fling ran nearly an hour

beyond its allotted time. Sam was DJ and entertainer of the night. He was funny and fun.

No doubt there'll be another fling in our future.

We made a quick trip to Georgia to check the rig out and take some measurements. Everything was fine but we learned our rig is too tall to get under an overpass into Cheese Quake State Park in New Jersey where we once stayed. Back to square one on that idea. We're making plans to be in Boston to see eye doctors and in New York to meet Grey, my new grandson.

It was bitter cold in Georgia. Snow flurries even! Why in the world did we leave Florida? We stayed indoors working on our summer itinerary. We finished it:

we'll have six nights at Harold Parker State Forrest near Boston and then seven nights at Spruce run Recreation Area in New Jersey where we can play with Curtiss and his family for a while. Both places look comfortable with trees and water nearby. We're glad to have that part of the trip settled. Kim will be with us then and once she heads home, we'll travel by the seat of our pants!

We saw a few friends in Paradise valley and we chatted with June & Sid for a while at their place. We took Carol & Gary over the mountain to Jim's Smoking Q for an early dinner one day. Then our ride back to Gainesville was pleasant and uneventful.

Uneventful is wonderful!

2014 April. nice to be back in the Florida sunshine.

We worked in the yard a couple hours cleaning things up from the winter wind storms and rain. He blew the roof clean and we filled the little trailer with debris. We took it to the dump and rewarded ourselves with a Subway.

One day , after a workout at the Y, we rode the bike to Cedar Key for lunch and nearly ran out of gas. Ultimately, we made it alright but it was scary.

Young Sam's in town taking care of the business of growing up: changing his car title to his own name, getting correct tags and insurance for it, and getting his own phone. Busy Bee. We met for pizza and learned he had to drive right back to N.C.

One day we decided to take a lunch to Rainbow Springs and rent a canoe. A most gorgeous day. Only about 50 miles away, Rainbow Springs is a lovely park with crystal clear water right down to the bottom.

Sam had his GoPro camera with him and got some nice video. Especially of me with that dumb orange life jacket as I sat in front, rowing. We scooted downstream rather rapidly for about half an hour and decided to head back to the dock. It took about an hour upstream. It was quite a workout and I thought I'd be really sore by evening but, thank goodness, that didn't happen. It was fun. A great day but next time I'll hold the camera and he can row!

What's the matter with me, anyway!

At the Leesburg Bike Week we met with Ed & Sharon who had ridden up from Haynes City. They introduced us to Stavros Italian Restaurant. Wow, fantastic! First we had a Greek salad with their own scrumptious dressing. Sam had lasagna and I had baked spaghetti. Everything was excellent ,portions were huge, Prices were reasonable and we took half of it home with us! What a deal.

While wandering around Leesburg we laughed and yakked till the motorcycle tricksters began their show. They do unbelievable things with their bikes; dangerous but exciting stuff. It was a fun day.

My nephew, Liam, stopped by to crash for the night as he was driving from Miami to Ohio the other day. He's 21, working and going to college and had just finished his junior year finals. A good kid with a Terrific personality, polite and helpful, A handsome lad working his way up in management beginning next month at Nordstrom's. It was nice having him visit us overnight.

We've been lucky here in Gainesville. There've been thousands of tornadoes killing people across the south lately and lots of flooding in this

part of Florida. So far it's missed us. Thank you Guardian Angel. An So ends April.

2014 May. Hooray! Hooray! The first of May. Outdoor intercourse starts today!

I left this message on my elderly Sarasota neighbor's phone this morning. She called back and was so happy to hear from us. . This Shakespearian phrase is one she and her friends had exchanged every year on this day. Sadly, the last of her college buddies recently died. She said she was lamenting to herself this morning that she had no one to share it with. And then there was my phone call… Perfect.

Our last two weeks in Gainesville were busy. I'd arranged to have work done on a couple trees. One looked like a dead pole but it was lifting and cracking the concrete driveway. The other is part of a beautiful huge maple. One large limb hangs precariously over the garage roof. Gaston Tree Service came with humungous equipment to take care of both these problems. They cut that huge limb off and safely lifted it up and over the roof. It was fascinating to watch. .

The last two days of the month we spent cleaning the house and packing the rig. Why I leave the bathrooms cleaner than they are all the time we're here , I don't know. That's Weird.

2014 June. Disasters galore!

It was a nice ride up I75 on a pretty Sunday. Arrived at PVC around 2 in the afternoon. Everyone tells us of how cold and rainy April and May were so I'm glad we'd stayed in Florida during that time. Those are our prettiest months.

Uh oh, disaster #1.

While unpacking we discovered we had no cord for my computer. We made a frantic call to Kim and three days later I was back in service. Thanks, Kimmer.

Mean while, Sam discovered he had no old work clothes here in the rig. Disaster#2. he wore good ones, very carefully. The next few days we worked at cleaning up the yard; raking and bagging leaves, and I rearranged the rocks around the various gardens while he scrubbed the rig and the shed. Finally, one day we rode off with friends to Blairsville for lunch. Our first ride this season was glorious. Perfect weather. Sicily's Italian Restaurant has the best pizza.

I'd like to try their baked spaghetti one day. Afterward the ten of us went next door for Cuban Café con leche. It was strong and delicious. Dean and Cindy talked us into getting a dessert, which was also out of this world! Then Dean paid for the whole coffee clutch! What a sweet surprise. And what a fun day.

Days later we all headed for Jim's Smokin' Q. It's just over the mountain from here but we managed to ride an hour and a half before getting there. Again, perfect temperature for riding and we got back just as it was about to rain. Perfect timing again.

Sam has a new toy; a Quadra copter. A drone with four propellers that works off a GPS system. He's having a blast and Crashed into trees only twice! It has a camera attached to the bottom as it flies over our neighborhood. He's posted some neat movies of it, with music. And he caught a beautiful sunrise this morning. So that's what he's up to.

I've been busy with these journals and my books. And planning our trip to New York and Boston.

Oh Geez. Disaster #3 lurks nearby ...

We're spending the night in a familiar parking lot; The Southland Motors repair shop in Buford, Georgia. Thank goodness these are nice, fair and honest people who know what they're doing. They replaced our brakes two

years ago and now there's a problem with the generator in the RV. Sam's been studying it for about two weeks now and has narrowed it down to an electrical one, not something he can fix. He made arrangements to take it in a day before our appointment so they could start on it early in the morning. He pulled it into the road in front of our site to hook the car up. After a while he came back in and said the car wouldn't go into neutral and couldn't be towed. We had to leave it home and took off in the rig, wondering what was going on with the car now.

THEN, Twenty miles from the shop the serpentine belt in the rig cut loose and we came to a halt. Now the rig had to be towed to the shop. First time ever. But how convenient - we already had an appointment there! While they worked on the rig the next day, the owner's grandson took us to the nearby Great Mall of Georgia. Several hours later he picked us up . Our poor generator was sitting on the floor of the shop with a thousand wires sticking out of it. They had to order a new control board. We drove the rig home with a new serpentine belt but no generator. A week later we picked it up And all was well with the rig. big sigh.

Meanwhile, what's going on with the Jeep? It's a good thing this didn't happen next week out on the road somewhere. We've learned more about it. Putting it simply: there was a recall on the 4 wheel drive transfer box last year. At some point while doing other work our dealership installed the fix. But this fix was faulty. So now the box won't go into neutral and allow the car to be towed. We'd have to go to a dealership and have them do something to it but that means make an appointment and wait. And it would be a temporary fix lasting only 4 to 7 days. Then it would do the same thing again. We're one week away from starting on a month long trip involving airline reservations and several Doctor appointments in Boston. We were in a flurry: should we rent a car? but it would have to have towing ability. Should we trade the car in for a newer one? Could we do this in the next day or two? We can't cancel the whole trip! Disaster #4. What a mess.

Sam had an appointment to have it looked at next Monday morning. But by Friday afternoon he was steeped in information about this problem. Folks

across the nation were experiencing it. It was all over YouTube and someone came up with a relatively quick fix.

It was temporary but could be repeated whenever needed. He tried it and it worked! It's a sequence of steps and Voila! neutral works!

So our trip is back on schedule and hopefully, everything will be okay.

Days later we were back at the shop for one night while they put the generator back into the rig. It turns out we'd had varmints nesting in it. They'd made themselves at home, snacking on the wires. We got out of there at noon and everything is GO for our trip. Phew!

2014 June. Boston and Salem.

Wow. After a nerve wracking couple weeks, we took off one Saturday morning with everything working perfectly. Our first overnight stop was in Elkins North Carolina. Then Winchester Virginia and Binghamton New York; All at Walmart parking lots. It's so easy to get off the Interstate and pull into a Walmart . compared to finding a campground or state park within 20 miles of our route and paying 20 or more bucks just to sleep there; this is the way to go! We do well with this program.

We enjoyed the cool weather and pretty scenery in and around the beautiful mountains up East. Soon we were in upstate New York where we began the Mohawk Trail. It crosses into Massachusetts and continues on to the Atlantic ocean. This is a designated 'scenic route' and although a little rough, it was lovely. And thanks to the GPS, we found our way to the Harold Parker State Forest Campground. It's beautiful here. The sites are twice as big as we've ever seen with a nice distance between neighbors and just 14 dollars per night.

The next day we learned a little about the Massachusetts transit system as we made our way into town. We stopped in at Hennessey's for our first lobster dinners of this trip. I plan to have a few more before leaving the area. We head for Faneuil Hall with its cobblestone streets, tall old buildings, shops, and eateries galore. Then we came to the Cheers bar and figured a

drink was in order. We had lunch there and because it was my birthday, we were given a large Boston Cream Pie for dessert. Yummy. We chatted with table mates from Holland and we bought Cheers mementos On our way out.

The next day Sam was entertaining neighbors with his quadra copter drone just as Kim was landing at Logan Airport. We picked her up at the nearest transit station, none the worse for wear after a 12 hour day of traveling. And the next morning we headed north to Salem Mass to see the witch museum.

We watched two presentations and a movie. The last was a realistic compilation of what happened back in 1692, based on recent research. One important fact we learned is that no one was ever burned at the stake in America. It had happened in Europe years earlier, including Joan of Ark, but had been outlawed there also. However, 19 persons, male and female alike, were hanged in Salem and hundreds suffered imprisonment and other hardships after being accused of practicing witchcraft. It's now believed that people became ill due to spoilage in some foods and grains. Some may have begun to have seizures or become manic or hysterical. Once someone was accused of being a witch, the hysteria grew. People were coerced and threatened by the authorities to name others as witches and the problem continued to grow. A horrible and frightening experience for the county of Essex Massachusetts. It's hard to believe this episode lasted only nine months. One good thing to come out of it is that our courtroom laws were changed at this point and much more proof was required before anyone could be accused of a crime. This was the beginning of our current court proceedings.

We wandered into the home of Jonathan Corwin, one of the magistrates who convicted so many innocent people. This is the last standing house from that time and it contains much of the original furniture and artifacts of the 17th century. Very interesting.

There was a festival going on as we walked through town. There were no cars on the main cobblestone roads; just kiosks and booths and a friendly feel about the place. By the end of the day we were all too tired to think

about cooking so we bought club sandwiches in the mall in the parking garage and took them to the rig for dinner.

With so much still to be learned about Salem, the next morning we went back. We walked right onto a replica of a ship from those days, The Friendship of Salem. We poked around in it a while. Then walked on until we came to the House of Seven Gables. This big house belonged to a female cousin of Nathaniel Hawthorne with whom he often spent time over dinners and such. He used this house for his fictional story of an older shop keeper who uses her home to create income. Our guide showed us a HIDDEN staircase built in the chimney THAT GOES up to the third floor. Sam and most of the group elected to go up that staircase while Kim and I took the regular stairs. Even that was tricky as it twisted in such a tight spiral. Granted, it takes less room in the home, but seems difficult to maneuver safely. This house was Nathaniel Hawthorne's birth place. When it was about to be demolished, it was cut in half and moved to this location.

The next morning Kim had an appointment at the Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary so up at 5 and off we went to the commuter train. I rode in with her and spoke with Doctor Gaudio after her testing. We learned what we have is called Choroidal Dystrophy. Well, It's nice to actually have a name for it but still, there's no remedy.

Sam studied the maps and the GPS and figured the 56 mile trip to Curt's apartment in New York should take about an hour and a quarter by car. We had books for Grey and heavy luggage and overnight bags to deal with, so the car seemed the better option. He was amazed at how swiftly we were able to travel. This'll be a cinch. At one point we were in the midst of about 5 lanes heading to the city. But looking over to the left we saw about 5 more lanes going in the same direction! Suddenly BB, our Bitch in a Box GPS, was having us veer left and right as fast as she could tell it. It was crazy. We paid 13 bucks and entered the Holland Tunnel, drove under the river and quickly took a slight right as BB instructed at the other side. . Oops. Now we're crawling along in line for the Brooklyn Tunnel. Drat. We don't want to go to Brooklyn but no way out of line. Another 8 bucks and we'd completely

missed Manhatton!! But that's where we want to go! The toll collector tells us to go on up to the Brooklyn Bridge and cross it back into the city. Now Sam's really nervous. The speed, the crowding of the lanes, Be Be telling us what to do, horns screaming at us… like who else would they be honking at? We're going to need gas but the stations are all out of reach. We work our way to the Brooklyn Bridge which looks like old erector set scaffolding, we cross it Unscathed. Suddenly we're on Curtiss's street and everything is quiet. We get out, take a deep breath, and look around. How nice. We offload everything. But we're not allowed to park here. Curtiss met us immediately, thank goodness, and went with Sam to find a parking spot. Six blocks away, 3.50 per hour on the street, and Only one hour at a time! So someone must go back every 50 minits -it's 10 minits away on foot- to feed the meter. Welcome to New York City.

This is a pretty street with wrought iron fences protecting trees Along the sidewalk. Some of the apartment entrances had stone spiral steps up to their front doors. The other side of the street was lined with Brownstones. A pretty scene that reminds me of movies like Barefoot In the Park and Breakfast at Tiffany's.

And we finally met Grey…he's just adorable. At 9 months He's developed quite a personality. He's friendly, curious, quick, and happy. In just a few minutes he was sitting on my lap having a grand time. No fear in that little guy. They moved Recently from a studio apartment to a TWO bedroom on the East side. Very nice. I'm happy for them.

But poor Sam. He found a spot to park ten minutes away, but the meters take only one hour parking at a time. After two trips making donations to the city's parking fund, he went back one last time and drove the car back to the rig for the night. Kim and I stayed here that night. We were having a nice visit when my cell rang. It was Sam. He was frantic! yelling something about gas on 10th street. Ask Curtiss if there are stations on 10th street he shouted! My car says only 35 miles left! I'm gonna get caught in the tunnel! He was petrified. He got gas and with much relief called us again to say everything WAS fine. He continued on.

Two hours passed with no word from him SO I called to check. He was just getting out of the Tunnel. He was frazzled. It was a nightmare! Inch by inch all the way. At one point the tow bar on the front of the Jeep tapped the car ahead of him and a big dark dude came storming back to him! Sam took a picture, there was no damage. but the guy wouldn't let it go for 50 bucks So

He had to call Geico and make a claim. Oh my gosh, what else is going to happen? It took three hours to make that trip. He will never travel in the Northeast again!

That evening we heard on the news that a section of the Brooklyn Bridge façade had fallen off that day and several people were hurt. Yikes!

Meanwhile, Kim and I had a nice visit with Curtiss and family. I finally saw the handy little diapers I've been sending them all these months. That evening Haley had an appointment and a function to attend so Curtiss and Grey took us out to dinner. We walked about six blocks to an Italian restaurant with Grey happily seated in his little umbrella style stroller. We sat outdoors under a canopy right on the sidewalk. Taxis and busses and trucks and cars honking and screeching behind me. So This is New York!!

Grey sat up to the table in his booster chair like a big boy. He seems older than 9 months. Then thunder began to roll and lightening flashed. Grey didn't mind at all . As we finished dinner, the rain came down in torrents and Curtiss grabbed a taxi.

Later in their apartment I watched as his Daddy bathed him. Afterward, he plugged the drain and let the water fill the tub so full that Grey could actually float. He has no fear of water. His Daddy used to swim with the Y Sharks team and maybe Grey will enjoy that sport someday also. They spend most of Curtiss's off time together and Curt's very natural about the whole Daddy thing. He's great. He wears a Papoose in front and Grey loves to ride in it facing forward so he can see everything. When he begins to make sleepy noises Curt turns him around and he just snuggles down and goes to sleep right there against his Daddy's chest. So precious.

The next morning Curt went to work and Haley wanted to have a run in Central Park. So Kim and I went along to walk with Grey while she did her run. A beautiful morning. We had lunch in Central Park. That afternoon Curtiss took Kim and me by subway, Actually it took two subways, into Penn Station to get the commuter train back to the rig in new Jersey.

Thank goodness he did that. We'd have never found our way. The ride back was about90 minutes, totally comfortable. Too bad we tried it by car yesterday. Sam's still recovering from that ordeal.

2014 July 4th. We planned a picnic and cookout at our campground in New Jersey. . It rained in the night and most of the morning, turning our sweltering day into a chilly one. By the time the little family arrived it had cleared up nicely. Soon we had burgers and hot dogs cooking on the grill, corn on the cob in the rig microwave, baked beans and potato salad at the ready. And the day turned lovely. I had Grey on my lap near the fire for quite awhile. He seemed mesmerized by it. Then Sam had him walking using his tripod as a walker. He was actually taking one step after the other. What a doll. It was a great day. It had been a wonderful visit but much too short.

This park is near Clinton, New Jersey, a cute little town on the Raritan River. We lunched with Kim the next day outdoors at the Riverside Café. And that evening dinner was at a rustic restaurant, Riley and Jake's. Excellent. Then she was off to the city again. Curtiss met her in Penn station and they went to his place for one last evening. She flew back to Florida the next day. We had a couple quiet days to recoup. After Sam's experience in the bowels of the city, he definitely needed down time. we went to the library for several hours catching up on computer stuff. In the morning we hit the road, landing in Knox, Pennsylvania. Here we'll have full hookups. We haven't had them since we left Georgia. This will be recuperative. We stopped on our way in at the local Walmart for supplies and luckily, because of the threatening sky, we carried our jumbo umbrella into the store. Later, about five steps into the parking lot with a cart overloaded with goodies,

the sky opened up and The rain came down in buckets. With Sam pushing it and me holding on to it while trying to keep the umbrella over everything, we literally ran to the rig. It seemed like half a mile across that huge parking lot running full speed. How funny we must have looked. By the time we reached the rig we were nearly hysterical. It was hilarious and exhilarating!

Unlike a previous trip, where we continuously encountered battery problems, this trip will be memorable for the damage we caused the rig. Not long ago we pulled in a slide and scrunched one of Sam's heavy duty Minitonka sandals. That wasn't too bad. We set it aside to pitch later but it went back into shape overnight. How cool is that!

Another day as we were settling in somewhere, I had the freezer door wide open when Sam pressed the switch to put the slide out. As it moved out it was a perfect fit for the fridge door to set right behind the edge of the wood trim on the dining room bench seat. We heard the loudest Ker ack! The trim was torn right off that seat! Another time we scrunched our Handi-vac sitting on the floor behind the driver's seat. As careful as we think we are, it's so easy to miss something and tear up something else. And why is it that the older we get the more often this stuff happens?

We went into Knox for hair cuts and noticed their old time parking meters along Main Street. Believe it or not, it cost a nickel for half an hour, a dime for an hour, and a quarter for three hours! What a shock after being in New York where it cost 3.50 per hour on the street and a parking Garage charges 20 bucks an hour!

This has been a nice respite. Sam's out playing with his drone entertaining our neighbors. When we left this little oasis we drove to Nancy & Don's house in Chardin Ohio. They're always fun to visit. We took a Lolley the Trolley tour of Cleveland and learned quite a bit about the area. Moses Cleveland, the father of the City, founded it in 1796. It grew to 261,000 by 1890. In 1950 there were over a million residents. Today, due to recessions in major unemployment, there are less than 400,000 residents. Cleveland's major employment today is in health and medicine. Sherwin Williams Paint was founded here in 1860. An Episcopal Church built in 1836 had been part of the underground railroad. We saw a building, still in use, Rockefeller built in 1904 with his name at the top. A great thing about Cleveland is their reluctance to destroy and replace old buildings. Consequently there's much history here. Barney's Bar displays the leg lamp from the movie The Christmas Story. You can even visit the house from that movie. As our trolley crossed the Cuyahoga, crooked, River to the East side of town, we saw a bridge imploded that very morning. Little did we know that a short time later, on our way to lunch at Sokolowski's Polish Restaurant, we'd need that bridge to get there. After a major detour we got there only to fine it was closed that day. Shucks, I was looking forward to a good pierogi. Instead, we went to the West Side Market Café for lunch. What an interesting place that is! Strictly food, each space is individually owned. There are fresh meats in large cold display cases, pastries and baked goods, fresh produce, even chicken feet, for heaven's Sake!

The next day we moved on to more familiar stomping grounds: Mosquito Lake State Park near my home town, Warren. We'll camp here a few days and visit family and friends. My niece Gina & Bob came by for a couple hours and I went with Nancy O and her cousin Lois to the Hot Dog Shoppe for lunch. Sam went to the pistol range with Don and the boys and later we met Mick & Mo for pizza at the Sunrise Inn. One day Sam and I met with some of my oldest school friends for lunch at a Café. Mary Collins Bertuzzi , Patty George Shahabi, Shirley Bumpus Benyei,and Patty Metro, all date back to kindergarten with me. So great to see them. They all love Sam. Later that afternoon Gina came to the rig and we made potato salad and deviled eggs for tomorrows picnic. But the weather's threatening to doom our gathering. We expect a dozen or more folks and the rain chances are 80%. of course we woke up that morning to rain. During a lull ,we fixed a 20 by20 tarp to the rig roof and unfurled it out over the sunscreen awning and beyond about ten feet creating a huge tent right outside the door. We already had a pretty ground covering mat so this was a nice space for visiting. Someone brought a pop up canapy that extended It's length along the rig even further. We had plenty of room for picnic table and chairs for the 15 or so attendees. By midafternoon the rain had mostly cleared out and to everyone's delight, Sam flew his drone. . The kids had a blast, shouting, waving and dancing around for the camera attached to the drone as it videoed the activities.

Toward dusk things had quieted down and we were sitting around chatting. I was at the far end of our tent when a stranger came up the walk to our group.

Someone asked if they could help him and he replied that he'd heard there was a party going on at this site and he was checking it out. My mind raced. who the heck was this? They asked his name and he said I'm Joe and I see that Gail is here. still no recognition for a couple seconds. Then suddenly it dawned on me. This was my classmate, Joe Martin! Gads, it's hell getting old!

I jumped out of my seat and shouted for Sam to come see who was here! We had emailed weeks ago about him possibly stopping by but I'd forgotten all about it. Finally it dawned on me and he was welcomed into our midst. When he learned that three of my deceased brother Tom's kids were here, he chatted with them at great length. I didn't realized Joe even knew Tom. They were very interested in anything he could tell them as their

Dad died when they were very little. He stayed a couple hours and it was great to have him there. When Mindy arranged everyone for a family photo, there's Joe, right in the middle of the Rogers clan. He was always a fun guy in school and he hasn't changed a bit. I was thrilled he'D remembered our gathering.

Later that evening, when folks began to make motions to leave and we were cleaning up, I noticed the girls had already put most of the food away and even cleaned the kitchen floor. What a great bunch. And what a wonderful day this was! Sunday we took down our life saving tarp tent and put the campsite back in order. We puttered around, getting ready to head for home the next morning.

Wrapping it up:

We'd met my new Grandson, Grey, and stayed with Curtiss and Haley at their new apartment in New York. That was wonderful. The best!

Kim got an updated report from the eye doctors at Boston's Eye and Ear Infirmary.

We learned all about the witch hunts of 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts.

And we had a wonderful time in my home town with family and friends.

Other than the harrowing experiences on some roads in New York City, this has been a successful, entertaining, educational and fun trip. Now we look forward to quiet relaxation in our lovely Paradise Valley Campground in Georgia.

As friends returned from their own trips, we sat many evenings by the fire far into the night. It's comforting to be back. See ya next month.

2014 August. On the first we were at our favorite place in Helen, the International Café where we indulged ourselves with a plate of Wienerschnitzel, German potato salad and red cabbage. Oh, so delicious. you see, we do occasionally order something other than the Reuben!

The next couple weeks were quiet and cool. More like September or October. We went for several rides and actually had to wear jackets and sweaters all day. It rained at night and was rather cold in the mornings, yet pleasant. We haven't done anything lately. Just sitting out on the swing with a cuppa coffee or tea and a good book. Living the life of the old folks.

Then one day it was sizzling hot when we rode to a car show in Clarksville with Patty & Roy, Karen & Floyd and Cindy & Dean. Obviously we had to stop for a DQ on the way home! Poor babies.

Woody Gap. Sam and I were checking the scenery out here when we heard some trailblazers approaching from the woods behind us . Two guys and a gal appeared at the crossing with a beautiful big dog named Calvin. He carried his own back pack full of stuff. We chatted a while and Sam took some pics and emailed them to them. An interesting encounter.

one day Sam and I were riding and stopped for lunch at the Toccoa Riverside Restaurant. We love being out like that, just the two of us.

He's having fun videoing all sorts of things. He does only requested subjects and doesn't get others involved. He puts pretty music to them and they're Really very nice.

At the construction site of the bypass being built around Cleveland, Georgia, his video was particularly interesting because no one knew what was going on behind the great wall of dirt they'd erected. Big things were happening back there ! . All his videos are on YouTube.

2014 September. labor Day week end.

We went to the clubhouse for Sunday supper. although the theme was a luau we saw no grass skirts. But Oh dear. Is “New Rig fever” going around? Two couples recently brought home different rigs. Melinda & Al now have a different toy hauler just as Patti & Roy traded in their Trek, which has been a money pit for nearly two years, for an8 year old Neymar Scottsdale. We’re all leaving in a couple days for a Campground in North Carolina.

Days later: Here we are in N.C. camping with two other couples. We all have rigs and cycles. It’s been fun with them; riding, cooking and eating together. One day we girls went uptown to Franklin to browse around a bit. They were great with me and I found several little things to buy. Each store we stopped in had something I thought I needed. Meanwhile, the guys rode to Maggie Valley to the Wheels of Time Museum

. The next day we all rode Wayah Road along the Nantahala River, crossing it back and forth through the gorge for miles and miles. It came out near the Nantahala Outdoor Center where the rafters and kayakers land. That evening we had hot dogs over the fire and a big bowl of potato salad. We had the corn hole game going and everyone enjoyed Sam and his drone. As it grew dark, we donned sweaters and jackets. Fall’s arriving.

By Saturday we were exhausted and begged off riding. There was a threat of rain all day so we stayed in and cooked. I made a pot of veggie beef soup. As a group, we eat well. All the gals like to cook so there’s never a shortage of food! On Sunday we rode a beautiful, curvy road around a lake AND ON TO cashiers AND Highlands and “Dry Falls”. Then it was only 10 miles back to our campground. Thiswas followed with burgers on the grill, pork n beans and coleslaw. Good fun, good food, and good friends!

another day Sam took everyone to “The Farm” at the Smoky Mountain National Park visitor’s center near Cherokee. No one in our group had ever stopped to see what went on here, and there’s lots to see and do and learn. We had a guide and it was extremely interesting. Afterward we ate lunch at Paul’s Family Restaurant in Cherokee. I brought home a lovely slice of peanut butter pie. On the way back the sky was threatening. We rode through dark clouds but got only a few sprinkles. Donna and Patty had made chili for dinner that night. The afternoon rain cleared up so we ate at the picnic table and later enjoyed the fire. Sam put his mystery colors into the fire and started playing around with turning plastic garbage bags into hot

air balloons. He had them rising into the air until one landed on someone's rig. oops.

This was our last evening together. We all enjoyed the break in our routine. generally these folks can sit and talk for hours on end, mostly about Obama and politics. However, this evening was all fun and laughs. Tomorrow we'd pack up and head back to Paradise.

I know, I know…It's a Tough life…

We met the gal who owns the rig next to us. When she realized my eye problem, she mentioned she has a grown daughter who is nearly blind. As we packed to leave I wrote a note and attached it to her door regarding my Pen Friend. A few days later she got the note and called me. She was thrilled and I was glad I'd reached out to her. I hope Samantha gets this tool and loves it as I do.

2014 October. Back in PVC.

One day we went for wings with Carol & Gary. Another day we took Sid & June to the International Café for lunch; Reubens and a visit. Becca took us to Cornelia to a great Mexican place, Casa Variocci, and then on to shop at Beall's.

Another day a group of us rode to Blue Ridge for lunch at The Garden on Main. We browsed through town and I found an outfit for Grey's upcoming birthday. Karen & Floyd had a bunch of us over for dinner one evening to initiate their newly screened in porch. Both the mosquito free porch and the dinner were super.

Linda & Ron arrived in Cherokee for their much anticipated vacation with their new toy hauler. We met them in Clayton and rode to Hog Wild for lunch in Clarksville. Then they came to PVC with us and finally they saw our campground. Then we rode through Unicoi State Park where they were surprised. This campground is hilly and shady, It's beautiful. I think they've

only ever camped in flat, open, nearly treeless places near interstates. Maybe one day they'll actually camp with us in the mountains.

2014 November Back in Florida.

Laura found beautiful tapestry Santa place mats for my dining room table. Now that room is Christmassy. And, after a few suggestions, Sam put blue rope lighting out on the porch, giving the area a nice glow at night. We love it.

Christmas dinner was sweet with Kim and Alex, and a new couple on our block. The next day Linda & Dwayne stopped on their way south to Sarasota. They stayed the night with us and we did breakfast at Country Foodly. Good visit.

Tomorrow is New Year's Eve, the end of 2014. Our only plan is to se ya next year!

2015 January. Snazzy, Cougars and Fires! Hoo ee!!

Well, nothing exciting happened over New Year's Eve so here I am, safe and sound, jettisoned into 2015. Another season passed peacefully. We had both holiday dinners at our clubhouse with Kim as our guest . It was nice to hear from old friends recently like Jane Bertolette, Sue Wells, and Karen Huddleston among others. Laura's birthday in Portland was a success with Partying at lunch with coworkers and clients at Sloppy Cakes and out in the evening with girlfriends. What a difference this new line of work has made in

her life. About time she had some fun. So all's well from my Portland chickadee.

Gas prices are falling. The average now is 2.19, about a dollar less than last year. Good for us. And my utility bill was 239 recently. It's been very cold the past weeks and that price includes electric, gas for heat, water, and trash pickup. Seems reasonable.

My computer is telling me to prepare for a new one soon. XP is no longer supported by Micro Soft. Everyone else has moved on to Windows 7, 7.1 and 8 by now and I'm still in the dark ages. However, my JAWS program will be entirely different when I go to Windows 8 or above which means I'LL probably have to take classes again. Today I took the first step by reregistering with the DBS-Division of Blind Services- so I could hook up with a teacher in the future.

Linda and I shopped the January bargains. We got PJ's and robes at 85% off, I found ear rings matching the beautiful pendant Sam gave me for Christmas: black onyx with diamonds. I still get my Maas Brothers/ Macy's employee discount on everything!

Saturday. We attended a Cruise at the clubhouse. What a blast that was! . 5 o'clock happy hour and cruise from 6 to 8. Outdoor tiki lights lit the way in front and back to 'the ship.' Inside were huge paintings of islands and oceans, as if looking out the ship's windows.

Hors d'oeuvres just kept coming as we enjoyed the music. Sam was the DJ and every so often he'd blast the huge horn atop the ship announcing all aboard. The Skipper came on the P A now and then to make announcements of things coming up. Once it was about a man overboard! Music, dancing and food prevailed. Around 8, as some of the older folks were departing, we heard "Goodnight Sweetheart" and things began to wind down...

Then a contingent of partygoers requested disco music and the Bee Gees livened things up again. We went on another hour or so till everyone was truly exhausted. A great night.

Sam did a fabulous job as music maestro.

One day we head Out with Linda & Ron to camp together for the very first time. We reserved a couple nights at Suwannee River Music Park. The guys had been working on their trailer since last summer and finally it was complete with Bed, twalette, sink and cabinets. Ron even traded trucks to handle it. So off we went.

We all had a good time. I say all because another couple Linda knows, with two children, ended up camping with us. They weren't exactly invited but when they heard about it they just came along. It changed the dynamics of our experience entirely. We'd planned menus and everything for four, not eight. And not including kids. But it worked out… Well, it was OK.

2015 February. The Florida State Fair in Tampa!

. First thing , while walking through the showroom we made a note to come back for some strawberry shortcake later. . For lunch we shared a Cuban sandwich and Soon we were in the Cracker Village. This is the best early settlement compound we've ever seen. All the buildings were moved here from their original sights around the State and set in a nice village. There were houses, a school, churches and stores with either old time products and implements or current items for sale. One whole section of a store was filled with books about pioneering Floridians. No CDs or tapes though. Dang. We visited old time work shops and businesses. Eventually we got to the Amusement rides .

With my limited vision I saw a little of them flying around high above me and I heard the kids screaming in fear and delight as we walked down the midway. Sam was a big help in describing everything until he lost his voice! We didn't ride anything, remember, we're old! Well, only 71.

But This was the first time in more than 20 years I've been in a midway like that. Hearing the children and Smelling the fries and hot dogs and all the other carnival foods was a treat. Finally we realized how tired we were getting and headed back to the showroom with the strawberry shortcake booth. Oh boy, it was super delicious. We rested as we scoffed it up at a

picnic table in the middle of a throng of folks equally tired and hungry. Somewhat rejuvenated, we left for the car and home. A wonderful day!

I've been spending a lot of time with the Venn Family genealogy. Nancy O, my sister inlaw gave it to me last summer and I'm trying to simplify it for easier reading. Even Sam's helping by reading it out loud into my recorder. Then I work my way through the19 printed pages. I'm trying to transcribe it into a document that can be read like a book. I'm about halfway through it at this point. No easy feat!

Oh, let me mention this: Before we left town for Tampa and the fair the other morning, we stopped for breakfast at Country Foodly where We ran into our biker neighbor, Jim.

With another cuppa coffee in hand, he excitedly told us of a new 3 wheel vehicle called a Slingshot.

The more he talked the more excited we became. We've got to see this thing! It sounds perfect. So we went to the Polaris dealership and… Oh my gosh, this thing is adorable!. Riding in it is exciting. It has two wheels in front and one in back, a 5 speed car engine, a steering wheel, radio, seat belts and roll bar, lots of safety equipment and we ride just five inches off the ground. It's beautiful, bright red!

Sam's been talking for several years about switching from the Harley to a mini Cooper or a dune buggy or something similar because the bike is wearing him out. Nothing we looked at or even thought about so far blew our hair back like this little jewel.

On Friday the 13th Sam took possession of his brand new 2015 Polaris Slingshot SL!

Oh, what fun! It's wonderful! We sit in nice plush bucket seats with seat belts! although there's no heat or A/C, there's much less buffeting by the wind. But the Harley didn't have heat or air , Or even seatbelts, did it?! We

can’t wait for sunny weather to get out and enjoy it. We’ll get a trailer for it and take it West with us this summer.

I’ll buy the trailer as my part of the deal. After all, I get as much fun out of Sam’s car and bike as he does. He’s already cleaned the Harley and its trailer up and is hoping to sell it quickly.

Fridays continue to shine on the Flynn Owens house. This Friday Sam sold the Harley by setting it out on the road in front of our community. He’s excited and so is the gal who purchased it. He’s had some tentative offers on the black trailer so it shouldn’t be any problem to move. Meanwhile, we’ve ordered a 7 by 14 foot open trailer with all the metal painted red . It’ll have pin striping trim and pretty shiny wheels. It will definitely NOT look like a trash hauling trailer!

Finally, we had a beautiful day for a good long ride. We rode to the east coast for lunch at High Tides at Snack Jack’s. It was a super comfortable ride in this new vehicle. We bundled

up a bit and enjoyed every moment. the wind is not nearly as rough as on a two wheeler.

Helmets are required. The seats are a hundred percent more comfortable. We did 300 miles that afternoon with no strained backs or sore rearends or exhaustion. And everyone just loves to look at this pretty little thing. At Snack Jack’s they parked us right in front of the door. When we came out there was a crowd gathered around wondering what the heck it was! People passing us on the road took pictures as they went by! It’s definitely a show piece.

We’re going to enjoy it this summer in Oregon and up in the mountains this fall.

When Kim saw something about it on line, her comment was… Wow! Pretty Snazzy!

And just like that, she had a name: Snazzy!

March, 2015. The Neat Niks.

Sam began cleaning the garage to make room for the new toys. He piled all the junk from his area into the little trailer and the jeep to go to the dump. then we filled the trailer again with hedge clippings and yard trash, and off we went again. This time we got our just rewards; a stop at Subway. Now everything's neat and tidy. He took the Harley trailer to the road and within a couple hours sold it! Now we're down to the Jeep, Snazzy, and the RV. And soon the new trailer will be ready. We think, and hope, it will fit into the garage alright.

we rode Snazzy to Stavros Restaurant in Leesburg. Ed and Sharon introduced us to this place a year ago and it's wonderful. We ordered baked spaghetti with the Greek salad. It was a gorgeous, sunny day. Probably over 80 degrees. I love how the seats in Snazzy hug your body. No slipping or sliding.

Everywhere we went we chatted with folks. Sam got new driving gloves at the Ocala Harley place and all the employees came out to see the latest thing in bikes.

The day we brought the new trailer home we spent a few hours practicing loading and offloading Snazzy. Everything works perfectly and we can't wait to take her camping. We'll be at Hillsborough River next month. I've contacted friends from Tampa to Sarasota and we're looking forward to a wonderful Main Bar Italian with some of them.

Young Sam was home for a couple weeks. He and Alex and Kim were excited to take a ride in Snazzy. A fun visit.

My Sam, Sam the Elder?, has been a little under the weather lately with a doozy of a cold. nevertheless, he's enjoyed Snazzy and everything going on around here. Just needed more frequent naps. Then I began feeling it. Dang! I spent my days quietly working on the Venn Family Genealogy and actually finished it up to the best of my ability. I sent copies to everyone I thought would appreciate it. I hope they do.

2015 April. Perfect days lately. Running errands in Snazzy is fun. We stopped at 5 places and At each one we talked with folks about her. Clerks came out of Lowes, the gals helping at the tag office took their Breaks to

come see her, etc. But we must find some cool, as in light weight, clothes for this weather. We're still hacking with head colds. Maybe it's the hundred per cent pollen in the air that's doing us in. Miserable.

We had a good time camping at Hillsborough River, a trial run for Snazzy and her trailer…

and us. All went well.

I met Sam's friends, Liz and Gordon, for dinner at Rick's on the River in Tampa. Liz is special. She and I chatted together while the guys did their thing. She asked about my eye problem and said I had pretty eyes. She pointed out I didn't have droopy lids like is common at my age and she wondered how I did my eye liner. I said I didn't do any liner. She said it surely looked like I did. I explained that over twenty years ago I had permanent facial makeup for the brows and liner done but my body seems to absorb the stuff and now my brows are just a light purply silver. I've had them done three times with different operators with the same results. She told me my liner was still intact, dark and very pretty. No one ever told me that. I would just put on some base makeup and sometimes have Sam draw on my brows with a pencil and off I'd go. No eye makeup at all. She made me feel great .

One day we met Ken & Caroline and Karen & Rick at the main bar in Sarasota. A reunion for us as three of us are alumni of the Maas Brothers that was right across the street. We'd frequented this place regularly all the years we worked there. It was great to see each of them. Afterward, we stopped by to say HI to Liz, my old nightclubbing and shopping buddy. Good to see her, too. Then we drove up Morris Street and I had a good look at my previous house. The new owner made a nice change to the front door area. We yakked a bit with another neighbor, Then headed back to Tampa where we had another get together with friends. Pam & Russ and Jim & Lynn were buddies of Sam's. They came to our campsite for lunch. It's been years since we've seen any of them and it was terrific. A beautiful day to be outside while Sam cooked his Spanish Bean Soup over the fire. With a salad, some French bread and a bottle of wine, we had a party! They loved Snazzy and everyone had their picture taken in her. This was such a good time. I

Wish Nancy & bob could have been here because they'd worked and played with these folks also. But we'll see them in a few weeks.

One pretty Sunday we took a ride to Brownwood, near Leesburg, to check things out and get a bite to eat. Ed & Sharon met us and they were crazy for Snazzy. Great visit.

In a note from Liz we learned that our friend Ed Silence was killed on his motorcycle recently. Seems he made a quick decision to change lanes and got tangled up with a Ford 250 truck.

So very sad.

2015 May. From Georgia to Oregon and back.

Beginning our summer trek, we arrived at Nan & Bob's in Alabama May 10. They live near Pensacola and the navy base. Nan looks terrific! Wow. She had a nice roast in the crock pot for us that evening and we had a good time catching up. We met her reclusive neighbor, Terry, whom I've heard many nice things about. I also met Gina, with whom we ran errands and stopped for lunch at the Crazy Horse with . Sam and Bob went in Snazzy to the Naval Aeronautics Museum and were treated to a flying display of the Blue Angels. They ended up having lunch at the Crazy Horse also but just minutes after we'd finished. Later that night we all had beanie weenies together. Somehow, with all the laughing, we end up exhausted every evening.

The next day we had a good lunch at Forest Gump's Seafood Restaurant. Then Sam worked with Nancy and her computer for a couple hours. Dinner was at Chubby's Pizza that evening. Ultimately we had a nice, quiet four days with them on their own turf. It's always good to see them and I'm glad we didn't make any fancy plans to do a bunch of stuff. It was pleasant to kick around and relax together. Bob's doing well for being 83 and Nan looks terrific in her skinny jeans.

We moved on for the Mississippi phase of our trip. I'm a little concerned about getting across the Midwest next week because every day or night lately they've had devastating tornados. One night there were 51 of them!

We stay at Timberlake Campground in Brandon Mississippi When visiting Sam's daughter. Now they tell us we can't have a trailer in that park! What kind of rule is that? I guess the aim is No motorcycles. We had to leave our new trailer up near the office instead of on our site but we can stay till Sunday, as planned. , Dylan and Lizzie, now 18 and 10, came by and we chatted all afternoon. Deb arrived and we shared the spaghetti dinner I had prepared. Deb loved it, having two helpings. And took a tub of it home for later.

Saturday was Dylan's High School commencement exercise. Only an hour long, it was followed by a reception in the church hall where I met more of Sam's family. Afterward everyone moved on to Dylan's favorite pizza place where Grandpa Sam put on a feast.

By the time the partying was over the rain was gone and we went back to the rig in Snazzy under clear skies.

The next day Debby invited us to a cookout at their house. another relative, Scott, puts on a dinner whenever he's in town. We had steaks, veggies, and an' everything potato salad' So we finished our Mississippi visit on a happy note. We went home ready to move on.

Westward Ho! Well, here's how it played out…

We very carefully watched the weather channels and learned Tuesday was to be a quiet day across Texas. And Wednesday probably the same. That's what we need; a two day stretch to get us into New Mexico. So we left Monday morning as planned. We crossed the Mississippi River and Louisiana and went as far as Lindale, Texas where we had our first Walmart stay of this trip.

Tuesday was clear, we drove all day stopping at Wichita Falls for the night.

We settled down with great weather channels to watch on the TV. Now we learned there was activity 40 or 50 miles north of us in Oklahoma. Tornadoes brewing, one touch down. Well, OK, it's heading northeast so we'll be alright. Then Wichita Falls was mentioned regarding activity in the systems. Oh heck! That's where we are!! Suddenly we're being blown mightily and the rain is whipping crazily. We're rocking n rolling now! We made a break for it and ran, in our rain suits and bike helmets, across the parking lot to the Walmart. Everything's quiet in there. Not a worry in the world. With all their zillion TVees, not one could be tuned to the local weather. The store manager indicated they had a safe place in the layaway department. He said not to worry about it unless, or until, you hear sirens. But, I thought, if we waited in the rig till then WE'D never get across that lot! We hung around in there nearly an hour and checked outdoors. It was perfectly calm and quiet. Not even any rain. We went back to the rig and kept the news on through the evening. It stayed quiet. At exactly midnight we woke up with the sudden sound of a huge trough of water being dumped on the roof. Suddenly it was raining and blowing fiercely. We put on our bike helmets - they say to do that if you're planning a whirlwind trip to Oz! We tuned in the weather news again. Couldn't believe we actually had reception! They acknowledged the storm in Wichita Falls but said it would be over by 1 am. And no tornado predicted. Hmmmmmm

. It went away, we slept, and in the morning we got the heck outa there!!

Now the threat was the flooding we saw ALL around us as we left the area. Luckily, or wisely, the Interstates and larger highways are built up higher than the fields around here so we encountered no flood water in our roads. It was very cold though and bikers were all huddled down as best they could. How miserable they must be.

We got into New Mexico that day and stayed in Tucumcari at a K Mart. Three other rigs showed up before nightfall. Still windy and around 47 degrees the next morning as we drove on to Albuquerque. We had a reservation at a campground for a couple days there. But before we got there we drove right into a very dense fog. It surrounded us suddenly and we crept along very slowly until we could see a pull off into a business; Cline's Corners: gas, food, souvenirs "their sign said. We parked the rig and went in the store to

pass time till the fog blew away. I didn't realize we had climbed so high in altitude that this fog was clouds!

The first thing we saw was an entire wall of Jelly Bellies!! Laura and Sam love the black ones. I like them as well as the tangerine ones. So we filled zip lock bags and the clerk took them to weigh. we had 58 dollars worth of Jelly Bellies! We nearly fell over! We found a couple tee shirts and when the clouds dispersed we moved on with our goodies.

Our next destination, American RV Campground, had all sorts of amenities, including extra long pull thru sites. It was great. While listening to the weather the next day we heard Tucumcari, where we'd spent the previous night, had been hit pretty hard with the storms. Boy, we seem to be staying one step ahead of it. Thank you, Guardian Angels.

We had all day Friday, May 22, at this park and although it was windy and cold, it was clear and beautiful. We offloaded Snazzy and went for a ride up the turquoise Trail toward Santa Fe. We'd started up this trail once before and didn't make it all the way to Santa Fe. This time was no different; too many things to see. This tiny winding road goes up the mountain and through a little community called Madrid, a rustic little village crowded right along the roadway. We stopped there for lunch at the Mine Shaft Tavern where we shared humongous brisket nachos. We meandered on foot down the road, browsing a bit. The stores were small , old converted houses and the restaurants were old wooden structures with small, or no, front yard at all. On one side of the road all the stores were high up and had steps up to the boardwalk type front porches. In many cases the step was just a boulder that was carved into a step or two, rough hewn and rather precarious at times with no railing to steady oneself. Thank goodness for Sam.

On the other side of the road each place had a bit of a front yard which in most instances was full of cars sticking out into the little road. The shops were full of unique, locally made items.

One lady had a chime collection decorating her yard. . These were each several hundred dollars, and had the most beautiful tone to them.

They were made of old acetylene gas canisters or oxygen tanks used before 1970 when such tanks were made of Very heavy metals. The individual tone each has is the result of how and where it was carved at the bottom. It was fascinating. Everything here is artsy, whether paintings or hand made

articles. Even the converted houses are bright and colorful. We learned that the Disney movie Wild Hogs was filmed in Maggie's Diner here. .

Saturday morning we left Albuquerque, heading for Twin Arrows Casino near Flagstaff, Arizona. But on the way we detoured a bit to see the Meteor Crater. About six miles off the highway, it's well worth seeing. Like its name implies, a massive meteor crashed into the earth eons ago leaving this mile and a half long, 750 foot deep hole in the ground. There's a beautiful facility here, operated by the state, with interesting information given in a thirty minute tour.

Afterward we settled in at the Isleta Casino parking lot but neither of us felt like imbibing or gambling so we just enjoyed our time listening to a book together. Early the next morning, before I was even awake, Sam went into the Casino dining room with his computer and researched the loud, squawking and squealing noises the rig recently began making. He learned it's most likely the leaf spring bushings. He's been shooting lubricant up to them every couple hundred miles. It helps for a little while, but… this is something to look into when we get to Oregon.

Next we landed at the Walmart on the north side of Las Vegas. We Stepped outside into nice warm sunshine. Aahh, lovely. Half an hour later Security came driving by… very slowly. Oh geez. Maybe they don't allow overnighters. Tell him we're just having lunch.

I should have known… He just wanted to see Snazzy.

2015 June. Stub Stewart State Park, Oregon.

Monday. It's cold and grey around here but perfect for settling in. The first folks we met Here are Loretta & David. They'll work in the Discovery Depot opposite our days. Their rig is next to ours in a little lane near the mechanics workshop. Most of the volunteers are stationed in the various campgrounds with the campers , usually out in the sun. But we who work in the depot are 'in the hole' where it's shady and cool. Dave & Loretta will be

here through June: then they'll move on and we'll work opposite another couple. Each week we have a pot luck dinner Put on BY the volunteers, and for volunteers only. It seems pretty relaxed and easy.

Folks were just signing on for June. Some repeaters, like us, and some brand newbies.

Tuesday we had an interesting, two hour meeting with the volunteer coordinator.

Wednesday, our first day on the job, We had the " Friends of Stub Stewart" reps working with us all day. They, Chris & Janet, wanted to be sure we knew how to run things. And we gained much info about the park from them. Sam ran through the terminal quickly, especially since he wrote their handbook for it two years ago! We worked by ourselves Thursday thru Saturday. By then the weather was clear and we had a beautiful day for "Free State Parks Day in Oregon". We had over 90 visitors in the Depot that day. A regular day is around 20.

We talked with a fellow who was part of the initial construction of this park and designed some of the buildings and a lot of its infrastructure. He lamented, his biggest disappointment after all was said and done, is that they had to remove nearly all the trees in the campground areas due to root rot. Consequently, motor homes sit out in the blistering sun. They tried removing only the trees in trouble but it left the rest vulnerable to wind and the possibility of falling over. What a shame.

Ever since we arrived It's been cold and rainy and Snazzy's been under cover. Folks are curious. On Sunday, our first day off, we met at Laura's around 9am and went with her and her client to lunch at McMenamin's. Trudy, a tiny 75 year old with a mentality of a 5 year old and a touch of dementia, is such a lovable gal. She has a deep, hearty, contagious laugh. If we laugh with her, she laughs harder, making us laugh even more! She's adorable. It was great fun with them.

McMenamins Restaurants are scattered throughout Portland: each one unique. Owned by two brothers who renovate unusual, unoccupied buildings leaving most of their original beauty intact. The last time we were here we went to one called Edgefield. which encompassed an entire city block. This

one used to be a School. Although it was late morning, there seemed to be a drag show going on in the performance hall. Woops.

After lunch Sam went to Walmart for a GPS for the vehicles and then to Laura's for a beer and a nap while we went to Macy's. A good day.

One morning while we were getting hair cuts in Forest Grove, folks there recommended the 22nd Street Station Café for lunch. Afterward we rode to McMinnville to visit Howard Hughes' protege at the Spruce Goose Museum. This time we actually got inside. Very interesting.

Laura showed up at the rig one day with little Trudy. We sat outside, chasing the bit of shade that was there. Trudy couldn't get up the RV steps so we kept moving our chairs and tables over to another patch of shade and continued our visit. She's such a delight and again, we all laughed our socks off. Laura's a provider and Trudy's her client. For various reasons, some folks have problems getting around, socializing and taking care of normal daily functions. They range in age from young adult and up.

Many have some degree of Asperger's syndrome or some other malady. Laura takes them to movies or doctors or shopping and such. She may help someone find an apartment, or learn to cook or whatever they need. Trudy is about 75 and has been one of her favorite clients these past couple years. She's been through cancer and has some dementia, but she's so sweet it's always fun to be with her.

Another week flew by. Sunday evening we met Laura and her friend Ben at our local BJ's Restaurant. I Didn't realize this chain is all over the country but nice to know. It's always terrific and we had a crazy fun time. Ben's an old friend of Laura's from school in Sarasota. Not a romantic one, but a nice one.

As we left the table, heading for the doors, Sam innocently asked Laura where she'd parked her car. She replied, outside. That struck all of us as hilarious and we could hardly walk past the other diners for laughing so hard. One time Sam & I took off in Snazzy for some mountain riding. We found some super curvy roads in north west Oregon, ending up at the burger diner at the top of a mountain.

Thank goodness Sam had a new GPS for Snazzy.

Already it has a name: GG. Short for Garman Gal.

All our stuff have names; Snazzy and her trailer,Snuggy,

Our talking scale at home is BB- bitch in a box. Sam and I are each Wheetie, together we're The Wheeties. Anyway, without GG we'd still be riding around in those trees! Nevertheless, it was a beautiful ride.

The next four days went by fast. We met a young man and his bride from Sarasota. That was fun. Saturday was super busy; I was glad Marcia and Chris were around to help. They manage the Friends of the Park Store and, since they've lived here all their lives, they have all the answers.

One day we had a picnic at our rig. Laura and two other providers each brought one of their clients and lots of food and drinks. Sam impressed them with his drone. Then he took each one for a ride or two in Snazzy. Again we were chasing the shade. After moving our chairs for the third time we all went in the rig to the A/C. Everyone had enjoyed the state park and had a fun day. This group of providers and clients get along well and do a lot of activities together. I told Laura she was just playing at work. She agreed some days were just that.

One Saturday she and I ran around a bit. At Macy's we ordered a beautiful recliner for her. I spent that night with her and when Sam came by to pick me up the next day, he fixed her troublesome, mis aligned front door.

2015 July. Schedule change: We'll work Sundays thru Wednesdays for the next 2 months. Perfect.

I think it's supposed to cool down soon. It's been hovering around 100 for over 10 days. Need a little relief, please!

On the 4th Laura came out with her Chihuahua, Sugar. We did steaks on the grill. It was so hot we stayed indoors goofing around. We watched the Witches of Ipswich. Not our cuppa tea but entertaining enough. Btw: (We call this puppy Shooghg, short for sugar. but how to spell it? I dunno.)

We took off one morning in Snazzy for the coast to visit the Tillamook Cheese Factory . Good thing we dressed for cold weather. The coast was grey, foggy and very cool. We stopped at The Blue Heron Cheese factory, where we tasted all sorts of things on pretzel sticks. Then truffles.

Neither of us had ever had one. The choice was difficult. Mind was a chocolate covered strawberry shortcake. The chocolate was so thick I could hardly bite through it. But Dee licious! Finally, on to our destination: the Tillamook Cheese Factory.

I was determined to taste each cheddar cheese: plain, medium sharp, sharp, and extra sharp. I will say there's a bit of a difference but not enough to make me pass up one or the other in a store. They were all good. While there, we also had freshly made caramel butter pecan ice cream in cones! Yummy!

On Friday Laura came out with a client and her boyfriend, Jade and Chris. We had a little cookout and mostly just enjoyed the day relaxing here at the rig.

Saturday we drove to the Portland Polaris dealer and had them shoot some grease into a hard-to-reach zerk. Then off to Pepino's with Laura for a delicious burrito.

Sam installed an extra light in her kitchen and Her new recliner was delivered. Its beautiful

. it has wooden legs rather than the normal boxy look of recliners. And the fabric is muted red and gold tapestry design. just Lovely. She moved things around and her living room now looks comfy and cozy. I'm so happy for her.

. Gads, when I think of how miserable she was all that time with the police department I could just blankety blank. She's normally such a happy, positive Person.

It’s back to work again for us for four days. We’re totally enjoying this gig. Our bosses and the rangers seem to like us and appreciate us… But we get uncomfortable vibes from some of the full timers. They have their own little cliques. Some are friendly but not the ones we work with. That’s the bad part of volunteering seasonally. They hold it against you if you actually have roots somewhere. Too bad, but that’s the way it is.

Sam met a fellow on line who has a Slingshot and lives in nearby Hillsborough. We met Paul and his wife, Caroline. We rode to the Coast together for lunch at the Shiloh Inn. They were great. We had a wonderful day together. In their mid fifties , they work and play together. Fun to be with. It was midweek and no one was anywhere around. The four of us rode to Astoria where we picked up route 202 which took us 60 miles to Vernonia. What a ride! the curviest, prettiest road we’ve ever been on. No sharp curves, just smooth, sweeping lefts and rights the whole way. We loved it. We made a pit stop at Birt’s General Store. This, too, was a surprise. Way out in the middle of nowhere was this wonderful, rickety old2 story building. A general store about a hundred years ago with its sign still on it. Now it’s a restaurant and nightclub. Evidently they do a good evening business and we can verify they have excellent food. No parking lot. Just stop along the two lane country road and walk up to the porch.

they took us in and showed us around and out back to the dining area. We ended up splitting the biggest, best burgers ever. This ruddy old building is miles out in the sticks and here they are, sitting down with us while they describe the healthy foods they have and all about their menu. Tthey even have a band some nights. We felt like we’d found a real gem out there in the country. . It was fantastic.

Sunday ,while chatting with Curtiss he told me he’d completed all the requirements needed for a certain position at work. He was thrilled. I’m proud of him. It’s been a long, hard struggle.

Grey, at 22 months is doing great things. He rides his scooter as fast as Curtiss can walk beside him On the sidewalks of new York city.

He'll try anything and Curtiss encourages everything. He never tells Grey he's too little.

The family is currently settling into a 2 bedroom apartment. Curt's handy at fixing things and doing whatever's required to meet their needs.

We're disappointed with the other volunteers here. I've mentioned that they're quite cliquish; and it hasn't gotten any better. We don't go to their potluck dinners. They're almost rude to us. Is it jealousy? Seems like it. Maybe things will change now since one couple moved to another part of the park and Another couple has moved in next door to us . Sam went out to meet them and found the guy interested in drones and is a professional photographer. so they have a lot in common. That's good. Bernie and Suzy seem like real people. Hope so.

They say this is the hottest summer ever out here. After a week or so of regular Oregon temperatures, it's over a hundred every day again! And it'll stay this hot for the next week or so. Geez.

August, 2015. There's a ban on fires in the park because of the drought. Washington State and Northern California are both fighting horrific fires. My friend, Rhonda, was evacuated from her home in Wenatchee, Washington a couple weeks ago. I don't know how we'd get out of this campground if one suddenly popped up here. It's scary.

Also, we learned of a daytime sighting of a large cougar near our rig here in the woods. That doesn't thrill me either.

On a lighter note: Our new neighbors are super nice. Bernie and Susan. He and Sam are becoming pals as they're each interested in drones and photography, among other things. That's good news.

I'm spending a couple days with Laura while we go house hunting! Maybe that'll be another bit of good news. Her condo is great but we'd like to find a place where she could earn some income from renters and gain a little security

Plus, it's been so blasted hot around here these past few summers. It's time to find a place that can be properly air conditioned. She's thinking she'd like to have her dad come out and share a house. Sounds like a plan. We saw some nice houses for sale that were just a bit more than the condo was. These were 4 and 5 bedroom houses with fully finished basements, fireplaces and nice locations. They were pretty houses with manicured lawns and patios. This is encouraging.

One day I called Curtiss's phone and asked for Grey James Venn. He put Grey on the line and we chatted a bit. He said "Hi Gimma Gail." he told me he'd been to the park and he was tired. And he had wet feet! Curtiss was pushing him home in his stroller at the time. It was cute.

Friday the 14th. We rode to Multnomah Falls yesterday and trekked up to the bridge for some pretty photos. We got a hot dog at the snack bar and headed for Laura's to see what else we could do there. Got back to the rig around 5 and visited a bit with Bernie and Susan. Seems our Gestapo neighbors are irritating them already. She and I enjoyed a visit while he and Bernie played with their drones. Then it got chilly and they needed to get their visiting grandsons in for the evening.

Sam and I usually settle down with a book for an hour or so before retiring. He's reading a series featuring Joe Picket; a Wyoming game warden. I'm reading China Dolls by Lisa See.

Sunday, July 16 2015. Halfway through our last month here. Kim was worried about taking a test required to keep up her nursing status. It was a lengthy one done on the computer and she despises that Modus operandi. If she had her way, tests would still be done on paper at a desk. However, she passed easily and was quite pleased with herself. Way to go Kimmer!

Good News! Our super, Marsha, offered to cover our last two days of this month. That allows us to leave five days earlier! They'll be doing inventory and training new folks anyway. They're sad to have us leave but our last two weeks on duty were kind of scary. That big cougar was spotted on a path near our rig. I'd been telling people you never see them because

they’re shy of humans and always slink off if anyone’s around. Evidently this one didn’t read the manual. Also, when I was at Laura’s apartment the other day it began to get very smokey in there. She had her bedroom slider open just a crack and the room began to fill with smoke. According to the news it was coming from fires in Washington State and northern Oregon, but all of Portland was dark and eerie: to the point where street lights came on

!

In preparation for her possible move in the future, we sorted 6 big bags of stuff out of her storage unit to be given away or trashed. Then we packed a couple boxes of stuff she wanted to keep and put them in the storage unit , relieving the apartment a bit more. Later we rode back to the rig where she’d stay with us overnight for the last time.

Highway 26 is a direct route from Portland to the Pacific Coast and all the beaches. about 15 miles out of town, it intersects with highway 47. 26 becomes only two lanes for the next 50 miles to the coast. But at that point we hang a right onto 47 and our park is about 5 miles up a pretty, curvy little road. On this particular day, 26 was closed at that intersection. All beach going traffic was diverted onto 47, totally bogging it down. Because of a grass fire nearby. We were still traveling in smoke and had no idea where or how large this new, local fire was.

When we got to the campground we breathed a sigh of relief; everyone there was cool and calm. They were in touch with the authorities. Water carrying helicopters flew overhead as we tried to relax.

Laura went back to the city while we went to the Depot for our last four days. Rout 26 remained closed so folks crawled along on little 47at 10mph in both directions.

We were inundated in the campground as folks pulled off the road in search of restrooms and snacks. Sunday through Tuesday were very busy. Weary travelers decided to investigate the park, take a hike or whatever while waiting for the traffic to subside.

By Tuesday afternoon the winds changed, we had clear skies again and highway 26 reopened. However, fires still raged in upstate Oregon, California, Washington and Idaho. I couldn’t wait to get out of this tinderbox and on the road home! And with fires chasing them to new hunting grounds, that sighting of the cougar may be a sign of things to come .

We had a nice last supper with Paul and Caroline Madden. And we met with Bernie and Susan Wild, again at BJ's. Laura met us also for one last good bye. Don't know when we'll see her again.

Good Bye Portland and Stub Stewart State Park. It's been an interesting, fun, somewhat scary, and generally unbelievable experience. It's Time for us to go home for a little R&R!

2015 August. Going home.

Trip Itinerary:

Oregon to Georgia (Walmart every night)

8-27 Thursday Pendleton, Oregon

8-28 Friday Twin Falls, Idaho

8/29 Saturday Ephraim, Utah

8/30 Sunday Page, Arizona

8/31 Monday Gallup New Mexico

9/01 Tuesday Tucumcari, N.M.

9/02 Wednesday Weatherford, Oklahoma

9/03 Thursday Fortt Smith, Arkansas.

9/04 Friday Bremen, Georgia.

9/05 Saturday PVC Georgia. Yahoo!!

Thursday, August 27, 2015. Going Home.

A beautiful day for hooking up and getting Snazzy onboard. One last good bye to Bernie and Susan as we got our stuff together. Bernie was chomping at the bit to move from his site to ours. Better internet. They were great neighbors and we'll keep in touch. Traffic was light around Portland as we head east on I84 to Pendleton where we'd spend the night.

Other than getting us a snack now and then, I missed most of the day as I stuck buds in my ears and listened to my book. I felt punk all day, probably from the days of smoke inhalation and anxiety. I was exhausted. Sam was so stoked to be on the road he didn't feel these side affects. Not until we stopped that evening, that is. We ate leftover spaghetti and were asleep by 8 pm.

The next day we felt better and took a little more notice of things around us. Eastern Oregon is lovely with lots of trees up on the hills and pastureland in the valleys. Sam commented on their innovative way of recycling old useless vehicles: motor homes, school busses and trailers . Even big box cars from semi-tractor trailer rigs had been set up in strategic places in the fields for various purposes. Probably more economical than building new out buildings. They had very nice farm houses and busy water irrigation systems, so we figure these were not abandoned pieces that had just fallen off the truck. Each had a purpose; hay or tool storage or shelter for animals or who knows what?.

We crossed the Snake River into Idaho, one of several times we would cross it.

A while later, following a suggestion of a Welcome Center attendant, we veered off 84 to do a few miles on scenic highway 30. Passing through Bliss, Idaho, population118, we pulled off at an overlook called Fossil Beds. The valley below is a burial ground for horses, hence, a fossil bed. Then, as we rode on I smelled water and thought they were watering the fields near us. But, no. On our left was a mountainside of rock with hundreds of tiny waterfalls seeping out of it. It was unexpected and so beautiful!

We passed the National Hagerman Fish Hatchery and crossed the Snake River again. Then on through lovely Idaho countryside just before arriving at Twin Falls. That detour was an enjoyable respite from interstate traveling. It

seems a waste to be crossing the country and not stopping to smell the roses, but we're set on going home to Georgia and don't want to make too many stops this trip. We've just been gone too long!

Leaving Twin Falls, back on84 tooling along in farmland, things changed to ranching for a while. As we got into Utah beautiful rock formations began to appear. This day was spent riding through these awesome mountains. We were bypassing Salt Lake City but saw some huge, gorgeous, churches in Manti, Utah, where we spent the night. The next day we went through the rest of this fabulous creation of rock, sand, gold and iron. Eventually arriving at Page, Arizona. suddenly, everything is lush and green, quite different from all the wonderful stone formations strewn across Utah. Page is built around a big reservoir and dam and seems out of context in the middle of the desert.

When we left Page the next morning, we went right back into sand and sun. We passed through a Navaho reservation, a shortcut to Gallup, New Mexico. This was a quiet 255 mile ride with little to see from the road. There's a point out there where Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico all touch each other, known as 4 points. We didn't go there, wee just kept on truckin with Sam making videos and me making recordings to write up later.

We've been on top of a plateau that extends from Colorado, through Utah and New Mexico, these past several days. . Our elevation today was over 7500feet and it was 75 degrees, bright and sunny. By Monday night we were In Gallup, New Mexico, about 1500 miles down the road. Halfway home!

September 1. Heading for Tucumcari, NM. Just east of Gallup we crossed the continental divide so we'll be going downhill today, getting off this plateau.

We were down to about 4000feet by the time we arrived at Tucumcari for the night. This was the second time we spent the night in this same K Mart lot. Poor little store… This town is so decrepit. We came in from the west on the old Route 66. Nearly everything was shut down. Motels, shops, gas stations, businesses… all empty. In 2004, just eleven years ago, we spent a couple nights in a cute campground here but today they're all gone. So sad.

The K Mart was open with only about 40% of its lights running. No Wal Mart or big stores in the area. Everything was nearly deserted. We shared the parking lot with a couple other motor homes and noticed several trucks spending the night in the lot next door.

The next morning We crossed into Texas. Definitely flatland, now we're seeing thousands of 250 foot tall windmills on one side of the road with nice, tall corn growing at their feet. On the other side are hundreds of cattle with an aroma that confirms they're real. We rode along the next two days, spending nights in Oklahoma and Arkansas. We passed through a bit of Tennessee and found a Walmart in Bremer, Georgia On the west side of Atlanta for the night. That left only about 150 miles to get to Paradise Valley. We arrived home around 10 Saturday morning and settled in while visiting with friends. How wonderful to be home. We were so tired it took us a week to recuperate. It was weird to feel this way because we'd traveled only 300 miles per day for those 10 days and rested each night. Maybe it was that last anxious week worrying about fires and wild animals sharing our living arrangements. coupled with the daily grind of travel. Plus there's the matter of getting older. This was probably our last cross country trip but we appreciate every minute of it! .

2015 September. A few days after getting back to our home in Georgia, we went in Snazzy for hair cuts at Styles & Smiles. Afterward Sam insisted we run to the drug store for a couple items. I questioned the idea since the sky was getting dark and threatening, but wimped out and let him have his way. On our way home it let loose big time! a torrential downpour. No top. No rain suits. Well, they were under our seats but We were already drenched. We couldn't even see where we were going. We crept along until we got under the overhang at Linda's Shell station. By then we were actually sitting in water in our seats : soaked right down to our grunders!

We laughed about it, but it was a little scary in that downpour.

We rode with Karen & Floyd one day to see Donna & Dwight at Calasaija Campground in North Carolina. Then we all rode to Chevelle's for lunch and

back home. Beautiful day, beautiful ride. Minimal sprinkles and wonderful friends.

I went to Doc Cummings about my aching sciatic. He told me to roll that muscle around on a tennis or soft ball to loosen it up and help it heal. It worked!

Since getting back, I've made beef Stroganoff and a pot of chicken noodle soup. Sam made Spanish Bean Soup over the fire. The weather's wonderful with a little nip in the air. Fall is on the way!

Yard work took over for a week or so as we redesigned the center plot of our sight here in PVC. I began straightening and cleaning out the rocks surrounding the area. Soon I was relocating them entirely, getting them up out of the driveway where people could slip on them. I worked for four days on my knees with a hatchet chopping out roots. I brought the pretty stones up into a foot high wall. It looks better and is out of the way of folks passing through the driveway. Now I'm sitting on Icy Hots and heating pads! Ya know, Some people never learn.

The next week, back to chiropractor-the tennis ball is doing the trick.

We rode with four other couples to Ellijay for lunch. Good fun. And one evening we went to the Holly Theater with Floyd & Karen TO SEE The hilarious Southern Sirens. But a funny thing happened that evening at this theater…

During intermission Karen and I headed to the upstairs ladies room since it's larger than the other one and consequently quicker. We were nicely dressed for this outing; she in a pretty long skirt. In this little, old theater, the stairs down from the ladies room are single file, poorly lit, and in a narrow, twisting passageway. Everyone goes down very carefully. For some reason Karen, who was right in front of me, stopped midway. I stopped. No one moved. Ladies piled up behind me. I couldn't see around her to tell what was happening. After a minute or two I asked quietly, What's going on?

She said she didn't know but she could not move her legs! She seemed confused and anxious. Finally we realized I was standing on the step above hers, on the hem of her skirt! Her legs were bound tight! Oh my gosh, what a weird thing! We laughed so hard we nearly had to go back upstairs to pee again!

Friday Cindy & Dean picked us up and we went to Cornelia to a ribeye steak house for lunch. What a quaint little building hidden in the trees. Great lunch-filet mignon with all the trimmings. Afterward, at Bath & Body Works, we bought pumpkin flavored hand sanitizers. Cindy says this is the only time of the year you can get that flavor.

This was our first time out with this couple and we had a terrific afternoon together. Good for all of us.

Linda & Ron arrived with their bike and new camper to their favorite haunt in North Carolina. They'd been counting the days for six months. Then, three days before takeoff, Ron got deathly ill. Possibly he'd inhaled some fumes while cleaning the headlights of their vehicles. His bronchial system closed down and he couldn't breathe! It was very scary. Two days later they were able to drive up. We met them and rode to Carolina BBQ in Cashiers, NC. We wandered around a bit in Highlands. But it was cloudy and the roads were wet that day which makes riding more of a chore than fun. Especially on just two wheels, as they were. Snazzy was no problem but Ron felt tense. They did get in a couple other days of riding but every day was threatened with rain. Too bad. They went home in heavy downpours. Dang.

We've had continuous rain since then in PVC also. So far, no leaks or damage.

Nancy & Bob plan to spend a few days in Helen's cabin in October so I battled the cobwebs again and got it ready for them. Kim's also looking for a time to come up. Suddenly things are popping around here.

Grey is 2 now. While talking with Curtiss, Grey was getting his own little steps out and arranging things to make a smoothie. Curt says that's his job. Too cute.

Our neighbors Mike & Carol, finally talked Sam into cooking up a batch of boled, that's boiled, peanuts to offer for sale in our front yard. Sam's been going to do this ever since we bought this pull thru lot 10 years ago. So finally he made his first batch. He used sea salt and a little Tony seasoning and… voila! Delicious!

But as time went on and the rain never let up, we ate them!

2015 October . Eventually rain was replaced with huge winds. They shuffled the soggy piles of leaves around so they dried out as they marched back and forth across the wide gravel lot in front of our rig. It was so cute to watch: thousands of leaves marching like tiny individual soldiers. They seemed very intense and deliberate as they marched all the way across the graveled property, first one direction and then simultaneously turned and marched in the opposite direction. All at the whim of the blustering BREEZE. Just Adorable

Nan & Bob stayed in the cabin a few days and we fixed excellent Linguine and clam sauce with broccoli and shrimp for dinner. They're leaving this morning for Ronny's place and will be back next week for a few more days with us.

While they were gone we rode up War Woman Road to Highlands and Cashiers for lunch one day. Sam really cut loose with Snazzy on that road. Fun.

Roy & Patti had us over for dinner, just the four of us. They're ready to leave for the winter.

N & B got back Monday, exhausted and hungry. We had my veggie beef soup and by 8:30 all were asleep! The next day we went to the Hiawassee Fall Festival where we saw Sammy Kershaw perform. It's fun browsing around with them.

Kim came up this week end and luckily it's Gold Rush Days at Dahlonega. We love that festival. She

arrived last Friday and the five of us went to Helen for dinner at the international Café. Afterward we browsed in Helen a while until it got just too cold out. . Several prizes had been purchased and everyone was happy.

That evening in the rig we assembled the dining table cushions on the floor and Kim settled down on them. It was as good and as firm as the blowup mattress and much easier to deal with than making the bed where the table is. Why didn't we think of this years ago?

Saturday night we had a favorite dinner: meat loaf prepared by yours truly. This was N&B's last evening with us. They departed for home first thing in the morning. It was a great vacation for them and we loved sharing it. Then the rest of us went to the Gold rush in Dahlonega and had their wonderful shaved steak Quesadillas at Shenanigan's. And before the day was over we'd also eaten a couple funnel cakes.

Kim loves driving in these hills. We taught her how to drive in steep mountains using her low gear on the downhill stretches. She was having a grand old time. We shopped at Alexander's where she bought some Clark Mary Jane shoes and thick winter sox. Every evening we tuned in "Murder She Wrote" followed by a couple hysterical Frazier shows. A wonderful visit with lots of laughs and fun.

The next morning after she left for home, we went for a bike ride with the gang. As it turns out, this is our last week here for the year so we'd better do as much riding as possible. Yesterday six of us went to the Hiawassee DQ. Today we included three more friends in our ride to Hogsed to look at boots and winter gear.

Then, with the biggest hurricane ever recorded coming into Mexico from the Pacific , and heading up our way, everyone decided to scoot! Preparations

began immediately and we were back in Florida by October 25, nearly a week earlier than usual.

Home in Turkey Creek again. We jumped right in; Raking, cleaning the roof, pressure washing the driveway, and tons of laundry. We had covered most of the furniture last spring and it seemed to help keep things dust and mildew free.

On Halloween we rode with Linda & Ron to BJ's for lunch. We dressed as Bat Man and Robin and earned a free dessert. everyone got a kick out of us in Snazzy!

2015 November. Sam & I met Kim and Alex at BJ's one evening. It's hard to get together with Alex as he works two jobs while keeping up his social life. It was good to see him, though.

Sam pointed out last year I might need to get some work done on the outside of my house. Some of the fascia and window trim look bad so we got an estimate on fixing and painting everything. During the discussion I realized this was my chance to change the ugly dark brown garage door to the lighter color of the house. I'm excited to get this done! It's silly, but I hate that whole side of the house, which faces the street, being so dark. This'll make a great difference to the looks and friendliness of it. And we found a cute little snowman to welcome folks as they come up the driveway.

Thanksgiving was pleasant at the clubhouse again this year. Kim shared it with us and Sam & I completely forgot to celebrate the 12th anniversary of our 'meeting by phone'.

The next day Kim drove to Sarasota to visit her Dad and some old school chums. She had a good visit and seemed to get along pretty smoothly with him. That's a good sign.

Tonight we went to the Red Lobster for dinner. I've been craving stuffed flounder for weeks and it was wonderful.

2015 December. Work is nearly done on the house. The guys worked all week and it looks fabulous. They were very particular, repairing bad facia and painting trim around each window. We selected a rich tan color called Urban Putty from Sherwin Williams and a deep chocolate for the trim. The big dark brown garage door is now light like the house. What a difference! They even freshened up the front door with a new coat of red paint.

We're sending the kids in NYC a holiday package. Little Grey will be adorable in these size 3T Levi jeans and shirts. They're so dang cute.

Today was perfect for riding in Snazzy to Stavro's and meet with Ed & Sharon for lunch. So Great to see them. They've had a rough year but both looked good. We all went to a Polish meat market and got a couple nut rolls and a pierogi or two.

That evening we found Snazzy's new license tag had arrived… SNAZ EE.

Our newly painted house got new decor for the Holidays. The long wall facing Turkey Scratch road now has a lighted Santa and Christmas tree. The double garage door has a big shiny red bow on each side of it and blue lights outline the roof. A cute little snowman stands out front greeting passersby. Of course, our dog Tanner still greets folks at the road and the two little bear cubs still watch everything from their perches halfway up the nearby tree.

Christmas Day we lunched with both the boys at Kim's. They're sweet and sociable and we all hung around together till late in the afternoon. We met young Sam's latest squeeze, Lizzie. She's adorable , huggable and fun.

New Year's Eve 2015? Um as usual, we slept through it.

2016!! Happy New Year in Gainesville, Fla!

OOPS we're missing January thru April. Donno how or why.

2016 May 11. my brother Steve in Michigan, 63, crashed on his bicycle in his driveway. It was a horrific fall. Come to find out, he'd had a mild heart attack, passed out, and fell on the concrete. No one was around or saw him there at the end of their driveway. Eventually he got up, leaving great masses of blood, went into the house and called his wife. When she got there he was in the shower. His long hair covered with blood.

A week later he was Still in hospital, not doing well. So many things wrong. The latest was his very low potassium and sodium. While his daughter Jen was there he had a seizure. Cheryl takes him food every day along with a healthy fruit smoothie. He normally eats very little. I guess he thought coffee and cigarettes would do the trick.

He was in and out of the ICU a couple times. Two weeks later he was released. I happened to call Cheryl just as she and Jen were driving him home from the hospital. They were thrilled to get him home. He'll have nursing care to monitor his sodium and such, He'll have to see the heart doctor, and he'll have many trips to the head doctor in the future. It seems he really did some damage to the brain as it's not regulating things as it should.

I spoke to him a bit and he sounded tired; just wanted to get home. Later that evening he called and was sitting in their front yard watching traffic, feeling better. extremely tired.

The next day he called me and was a totally different person, happy and clear. He was elated, almost euphoric! He'd been off coffee and smokes for two weeks and was happy about that. I guess he went through withdrawal while unconscious. That's one tough way to do it. He told me about how he blacked out and fell over with his feet still in his bike stirrups and still holding the handlebars! He smacked face first on the concrete damaging the front of his brain, and pulling something loose at the back of his head. He still has double vision but says this was the best thing to ever happen to

him. He was happy and positive, which is unusual for him. Maybe he'll be a whole different person with a new lease on life. I hope.

May 28th. I talked briefly with Steve. He's still in a great frame of mind. When his eyes clear he wants to get a video series called "Understanding the Brain" by Jeanette Norden.

She's a surgeon and a professor at Vanderbilt with excellent credentials. This is an informative series available at the library. She's a fantastic speaker who makes everything understandable. Everyone should have this information. Check with your library.

Back in Florida: Ride to Eat!

Thirty four Slingshots, over 50 people, rode to Pecks Seafood near Chrystal River. With us. We found this place a couple weeks earlier. Sam did a great job organizing this ride via facebook. Everyone enjoyed meeting new, likeminded people. It was a gorgeous, summer day in Florida.

Curtiss, Haley & Grey arrived at our house about 2 o'clock one Saturday afternoon. Grey is wonderful. He's happy, friendly and smart. Kim came over and we sat with him while his parents went to a wedding that evening. He got to ride in Snazzy with Sam and the next day he taught his daddy how to drive it.

"No Daddy, you have to say 'contact' before you do it!

We swam at our community pool where he had a blast, like a fish. My son and his wife, are proving to be excellent parents. A short but sweet visit.

As we passed Linda's exit on I75 I gave her a shout on the phone and we waved to each other over the five miles between us. I left her laughing when I told her my egg story:

One day I put 7 eggs into my egg cooker. Usually when they're done I peel and store them in the fridge for later. But this time when I peeled them I found I had only 6. Geez, I could have sworn I'd put 7 in the cooker. That evening Sam asked me what that egg on the counter was for. It was back behind a bowl out of sight. Oh, I said, "I knew I'd cooked 7 this morning. I grabbed the egg and promptly banged it against the inside of the sink to crack and peel it. The egg certainly cracked. All to bits and ran dripping through my fingers! It was raw! What a shock!

2016 May. Heading to the Slingshot Rally.

It was a pretty ride on the back roads of Georgia and into North Carolina. Smoke Mont is a beautiful forest with a river running through it. A National Park, it has no hookups for electric or water, nevertheless it's totally sold out for the Memorial Day week. Most folks here have generators for cooking and keeping cool. It's been very comfortable all afternoon without A/C. Our site's huge. The concrete slab is 90 feet long with quite a distance to our nearest neighbor. We love State and National Parks. But It does get pitch black under these trees. And there are no lights or generators allowed after 8pm so it's very quiet and dark. .

In the morning we rode to Maggi Valley to check the area out where the rally was being set up. We met Ivor, the organizer of these shindigs. A talkative Brit, with more energy than Sam and I together! Glad he's in charge. We had a milkshake with two straws at the Happy Days Diner in Pigeon Forge.

2016 June. Our first Slingshot Rally. Sign up day.

We wandered around where all sorts of work was being done to Slingshots; new exhaust systems, new back fenders, and various other improvements were taking place. We found a Tee shirt for each of us. Folks recognized Sam from all the videos he's made regarding the Slingshot: he's quite the celeb! And for the most part, he recognized many from Facebook also.

I saw the magnificent new trailer Captain Vance built. We chatted with Paul Down as he installed a fender for someone. Paul designed and manufactures this fender. He sent Sam one earlier to video the installation

and give his opinion of it. Everyone loves it and the video greatly enhanced it's sales. Sam and Paul met in person at this meet and They've become good friends. Paul's a super nice fellow, our age, and down to earth. Now he's working on more accessories for the Slingshot and testing them with Sam. While waiting for him to be free for lunch, we browsed around in the Maggie Valley shops a bit. Guess what we found! A perfect sized motorcycle for little Grey! It has 3 wheels and looks like a Harley. It has buttons to push for sirens and motor sounds. What a great gift for that little guy. I can't even wait for his birthday. He'll be 3 in September but we'll send him one now! !

At our first ride of the rally, about 120 bikes were divided into groups of 15. We loaded our pockets with snacks and water, and Ivor sent us on our way. , group by group. The hotrodders went first and then the easy riders. Each group had a professional leader and a tail gunner. Everyone signed waivers in case of accident and received wrist bands to identify that we're part of the group. Ivor's a professional organizer and everything went off like clockwork. This ride took us to Deal's Gap-the Tail of the Dragon. A beautiful part of the route getting there was along a ridge on the side of a mountain right above the Fontana River. probably as curvy as the Tail. We loved it. Exhilarating! Our next stop was the local Harley dealership where another fellow introduced himself to Sam. This guy had driven his Slingshot from South Dakota especially to experience this rally and to meet Sam. Everyone knows Sam from his articles and videos. We got back to the rig around 3 that afternoon, Happy but exhausted.

5am was a long time ago!

The next day was misty, a play day. We took our computers and phones to McDonald's in Cherokee and set up an office. We had breakfast and coffee and worked for a couple hours. Later, while I made chicken soup in the rig, Sam went back to Mc D's to put his stuff online. Knowing that it rains here every afternoon at 4 o'clock sharp, he got home about 4:30. Yep, drenched.

Friday we got down there early and met up with our Florida contingent before the ride. Some came early to see everyone and make plans for the next couple days. We rode with a group on the Blue Ridge Parkway as far as Asheville where we cut off to go to the Biltmore Village for lunch. This is that cute downtown area that was erected by the Biltmore family to house the

workers back when the mansion was being erected. Now the huge old homes are elegant restaurants with upscale shopping and lovely B&B accommodations above them. cobblestone streets and old fashioned lights at each corner create a picturesque scene reminiscent of earlier days. We got back to the rig just as the rain started again. Perfect. Early the next morning we left for home and by noon we were settled in Paradise Valley. Saw a few friends and had a quiet evening. After 10 days with no electric or water, it's nice to have everything running again.

Yes, this definitely is Paradise.

Surprise! As Sam & I strolled around the neighborhood, checking as usual on N & B's site. There was a small rig parked there and some folks were milling around. It turned out this is a rig Nan & Bob were thinking of buying to leave here permanently. In speaking with Kay & Don, the owners, we realized they had indeed sold this rig to N&B. We also learned that they'd be here in two days! That little stinker, I said to Kay. I'd been talking with her all along and she never said they'd actually bought a rig. She wanted to just come to our place one day and knock on the door and say, "We're Baaaack!"

They arrived about 8pm a couple days later, car packed to the gills, tired but glad to be here. I was going to have dinner for them but they'd been snacking and weren't hungry so we put it off until the next evening. They had power so the Air and the fridge and lights worked, but no water. Couldn't even flush a toilet! Sam brought them 5 gallons of water for the night and worked the next day repairing cracked pipes in the ground so they could hook up.

Tonight we'll have steaks and corn on the cob Nan & Bob brought, and home made potato salad.

Nan's busy organizing shelves in their little rig and putting things away. Karen & Floyd had us over for dinner.; a thank you for an internet job Sam did earlier. . Just the four of us was nice with lotsa laughs.

Now we're heading into three days of rain so Sam bought a big role of plastic to cover the new outdoor furniture we just purchased. We're supposed to let it set and dry out until about September and then use some Thompsons sealant to protect it for the year. In the meantime we're keeping it as dry as possible.

The kids got the motorcycle we sent Grey, he's excited! I hope it lasts through the summer.

Sam found a place online that sells the most darling animals for the yard. We ordered two precious little bear cubs. They're already climbing on our tree near the road. They're halfway up the tree, looking back down at us on the ground. Just adorable. These little guys look so real and are light weight so won't harm the tree or fall off it. The neighbors love them! In just two days they were dubbed Stinky and Poo!

On my birthday, we went with Nan & bob to the Holly Theater to see The Lion King. Performed mostly by youngsters. They were terrific. a fun play. Then on to Shenanigan's for eats out on the deck. Later Nan had cake and ice cream for us. Another birthday with our besties.

Laura sent me a box full of little gnome things: a house, a swing with a little person swinging, yard furniture and tools, sidewalks, bridges, and so many other accessories. So I crawled around in the azalea bed and set up a Gnome Village. Kim gave me two more of the larger size gnomes, so I have three big guards at the top of the hill watching over the village. It's adorable. but the bridges needed a stream to flow under them. So, I got an ax and chopped out a stream from one end of the village to the other. Maybe a total of 6 feet. I lined it with clear Saran wrap and filled it with tiny blue, green and turquoise stones that Nancy contributed to the effort. Now the bridges look like they have a reason to be there.

I like to detour folks from the road around the hedge to see this. Their reactions are awesome. And it's fun to share it.

2016 July. One day while out with Linda & Dwayne enjoying the pizza at Sicily's in Blairsville, we stopped in at a little coffee shop on the circle. Oh my goodness, hidden in their basement was a dessert heaven, or haven.

We brought home a couple pieces of 7 layer carrot cake. They were scrumptious! We get into more trouble with these two.

The 4th of July week end was nice here in PVC. During the decorated golf cart parade Nan & I sat with Carol on her porch chatting. We seldom get to visit with her because her husband keeps her so busy with his lawn service business. but we had a good long time together that day. She's quiet and shy and we think he's quite domineering. It's a shame.

Sunday's picnic at the pavilion was well attended. Had a chance to visit with many folks we don't often see.

Another day we went to Amacolola State Park with Nan & Bob, along with her son and his daughter: Ron and Natasha. r. Sam & I led the pack on Snazzy and they followed in their car. A gorgeous day for walking down the path to the beautiful waterfall way back there on the mountainside. They loved that we'd taken them to this gorgeous park. Later we stopped at Johnny B's for lunch. At 20, Natasha has grown into a nice young lady, anxious for whatever comes next. We wish her luck in all her endeavors. The next morning Sam gave them each a ride in Snazzy. They were so excited and now she and her Dad each want one. They left for home at noon and we met Nan & bob at the pool.

aah. it was nice to wahller around in the water! We made plans to do this every afternoon.

Well heck. The next afternoon it rained!

Oh No ! Bob fell getting out of the shower. He cracked three ribs and hit his head. He spent a couple days in the North East Georgia Medical Center. It was scary. a week later, he's doing well.

On Sam's birthday he posted, "It's my birthday and I'll cry if I want to, cry if I want to. You would cry too if you were 72"!

N & b came over for Sam's favorite meal: meatloaf and mushroom gravy with veggies. Then we met at their house for strawberry shortcake. Everything was yummy. Happy B Day Sam!

One day we rode with our regular group, led by a new couple, Bruce & Terri. They each ride a big Harley, and usually very fast. Today, though, they were sedate and accommodating. Ya know, some of these older guys don't exactly tear up the road on their trikes! On a hundred mile ride, we ended up at Chevelle's . Then it was only 50 miles back home. It was a cloudy day, actually very comfortable.

Nan & I have been to the pool a couple times now. She does her laundry there… Not in the pool exactly, but at the nearby washateria, and we hang out in the pool between cycles. The four of us had an interesting time last evening. We thought there was to be live music and beer around 6 pm at a place called Cowboys and Angels. Nan and I felt angelic that day and talked the guys into taking us out. However, we learned it's only on Fridays and Saturdays. We sat there at the bar for an hour or so anyway. Bob was very chatty with Sam and we gals had a good visit. For a while there we thought we were getting picked up by a really good looking hunk of a cowboy but it turned out he was the cook and server there. Probably just doing a little PR. Dang!

A Dollar General store popped up in our neighborhood. Am I complaining? Hail No! I love Edie's drumstick ice cream!

One day we ran around getting haircuts and banking and groceries and such. That evening, my back hurt like I'd pulled a muscle or something. I didn't feel it happen, but have since been to the Back O Cracker three times and spent 10 days on ice and heat. Just miserable. Couldn't get in or out of Snazzy, so had to bum rides with friends to the doctors. It's a little better and hopefully will go away soon .

YAAA CHOO!!

WOW! Didja hear that?! I just sneezed and it didn't hurt my back at all. WOW!! What a relief!

Sam’s busy making videos for an estate agent while I’m enjoying being home alone.

We went with Carol & Mike to a little circus where We sat on stadium bleachers in the YMCA gym and I had no problem with my back. And afterward we went to a Mexican restaurant.

It was 61 degrees this morning. How nice. Fall is coming

Nan & Bob passed their doctor visits in Florida and came back up to PVC. We’re all going to Macy’s in Buford this week to browse around. Bob came here with practically no warm clothes. Gotta get him some jammies, jeans and grunders. Then we’ll find a place for lunch.

September, 2016. Oh good, cool weather arrived. We made it to the Mall of Georgia one day for a few items we thought we needed. We looked at a foam topper for N & b’s bed in their new camper and had lunch at the Buford Grille in the old historic part of town. Very enjoyable.

Several days later a troop of riders visited us: three couples and one single guy, in Slingshots and Gold Wings. They’d driven down from Boston just to ride with us. We rode these mountains till everyone was exhausted! It was chilly and exhilarating! Beautiful weather and an exciting time. They loved these roads. They’re perfect for any vehicle.

It was already time for our Pre Thanksgiving dinner again. .

The inevitable trashcan turkey was perfect, as always. the sweet potato casserole, the green beans, the dressing, cranberries and the crock pot full of hot gravy, and pumpkin pies, all terrific. Some folks played cornhole and some of us just had fun chatting. A wonderful gathering. But it’s always hard to say goodbye again.

We drove home towing Snazzy. It seemed like an exceptionally long haul this time and we were exhausted. It was nearly dark as we came into our neighborhood but from the moment we arrived we knew things were different. Our new neighbor, Val, was very snippy when we spoke to her on the street. Sam mentioned using her driveway a few minutes while we'd empty our freezer as discussed last spring. She'd agreed at the time but obviously things changed. No problem; we emptied the freezer from the street and Sam backed the rig into Shirley's driveway for the night As was also previously arranged. We settled down in our own bed that night and slept like a couple of rocks!

The next week was busy emptying and cleaning the rig. Little by little we learned a bit about our new neighbor. She has a few friends in our community who seem to dislike everything about it. They enjoy pointing out negative things about Anything and everything. They're quickly gaining a bad reputation. and lucky us, we get to have one of them right next door! And her driveway is barely 10 feet from our front door.

2016 November. We're in Sarasota to meet with Laura, who flew in from Portland to help her dad. His house is a mess, He has Parkinson's disease, and he's become a hoarder. He desperately needs help but doesn't want any changes made .

Laura's good friend Matt, lives in Sarasota now, caring for his own mother. He secured a condo on Siesta Key for us for a week. We spent a couple nights hanging out there with the two of them, having dinner at the Daiquiri Deck one night and at Captain Curt's the next where Laura sang Karaoke.

Another old friend of hers, Dudley, joined us and they had a maahvelous time together. The great news is that Laura is ready to sell out in Portland and move back to Florida!

Kim and I Shopped for bedding for her dad's house. She's going there for a few days over Thanksgiving to visit him and do some cleaning. He has a 3bedroom house but sleeps in an office chair in front of the living room TV. Every inch of space is stacked with stuff.

This is perfect timing for Laura; she's so ready to leave Oregon. And he obviously needs help.

She's already sent a resume for a position in Sarasota. And she called a Portland real estate lady and has things moving along on that front as well.

No grass grows under this gal!

Here in Gainesville, we're enjoying perfect weather. The house is open and ceiling fans gently run as pretty music plays. Very pleasant.

I chatted with neighbors at our mailboxes and it seems our new resident has ticked off each of them already. She has a nasty way of responding to anything anyone says to her. Sharp and snippy.

Saturday morning Sam and I took off early to meet friends and ride to Daytona. Good to see everyone again. We four couples really hit it off and enjoy each other on these lunch rides. Lowella & Greg live about a mile away, John & Sherri come up from Ocala and meet us on the road, and we meet Dawn & Scott at a destination point further east. We gals are the corner stoners of the Slingshot ladies.

Well, in our own minds, anyway.

Thanksgiving Day Sam & I were on our own so we met L & R on the road and went to a Cracker Barrel. What a great operation that is! they must seat a couple hundred people at a time and feed them Delicious huge turkey dinners with all the fixings. we were stuffed, and only 13 bucks each! And its always nice to spend time with my BFF and her hubby.

These days our heads are filled with the idea of Laura moving back to Sarasota. A huge undertaking. Within a week she had a moving van take away some furniture and boxes. And via Skype, she already has a job to go to in Sarasota! Kim and Curtiss both plan to go there and help there Dad while they clean out a room for her. But, big Curt may, or may not, be ready to move some of the stuff out. It's exciting and I'm happy she'll be back here with friends and family and that they're all participating in helping their dad.

In Portland people are packing and cleaning and painting her condo. She wants it sold yesterday!

At Christmas dinner we had Young Sam and Lizzie along with Alex, Kim, Sam and me. Perfect. Lizzie is adorable and young Sam was so proud to Have her with him.

New Year's Eve passed quietly. We woke up in 2017 with no horrific tragedies reported in our country. Happy New Year !

2017 January. Turkey Creek Forrest, Florida.

What a gorgeous day. Tee shirt weather. I crawled around under the trees out front, setting up the gnome village I brought from Georgia. It's so dang cute! But it will probably be buried in leaves in two days! Sam's busy in the rig here in the driveway. He's installing several new window shades. Even the box where the TV used to sit will hold our music system with a pulldown shade.

He had another successful outing with the Slingshot group. 20 Slings gathered, from all around Florida, for lunch at the Hide Away on Lake Harris near Mount Dora. Everyone enjoyed meeting likeminded folks and they congratulated Sam on his organization of the outing. I'm so impressed with him and with these friends. They're super nice and so careful with me while he does his videos with the drone and all. Even the guys, John, Greg and Stuart watch out for me. Stu kept supplying me with napkins while I ate a sloppy Philly cheese sandwich at the picnic table. He kept after the ants that wanted me to share it!

one day I decided it was time to get rid of the old curtain schemes in both the bedrooms of our house and do something pretty and modern. This old stuff has got to go! They're downright ugly! I ordered light tan blinds, two inch faux wood slats. No more old fashioned sheers or heavy pull string drapes. Let's let these rooms breathe!

When the new blinds arrived Sam installed them immediately . They're light tan faux wood, yet They make it possible to darken the room.

We can't believe we left those horrible old drapes in that room all these years.

But once he got the blinds installed, he loved the look of them and wanted to leave it at that.

Oh No, It's too stark. It Looks like an office. We need the curtains. So, the next day my sheer curtains were hung. They're dark tan, like a netting, with scalloped edges, pulled back on each side into decorative holders. Beautiful. The bedroom is now elegant and comfortable.

Laura update: Her Portland apartment sold immediately, cash deal, Closing on January 27.

Now I pray the roads from there to here will be safe and dry. It's a long, long haul across the nation. She'll be traveling with her friend and client, Eleanor, plus two pups. Eleanor, 29, has Down's syndrome and uses a wheel chair, and has a wonderful sense of humor. She's great fun to have around. It will be quite a trip for them.

Sam studied their trip tic and will send helpful info daily.

2017 February. Laura's cross country itinerary:

, including after the fact comments

January 30 Monday Portland-hotel bed super hard, didn't sleep well.

Jan 31 Tues. Wyrick, Ca. (Eureka) the Super8 OK day, exhausted.

Feb. 1 Wednesday Fresno Ca. La Quinta Suites great Mexican taco bowl for dinner.

Feb 2 Thurs. Palm Springs. El sick and moaning all day from Mex beans, bad day.

Feb 3 Tucson. America's Best Value. Stuck in Phoenix, arrive in dark. panicked. Sam found hotel.

Feb 4 Saturday El Paso, Texas La Quinta.

Feb 5 Sunday Midland Texas La Quinta discovered "OnStar" capabilities. Wonderful!

Feb 6 Monday Arlington Texas near Dallas La Quinta Suites good day.

Feb 7 Tues. Opelousas, Louisiana Comfort Inn-strange. spooky hotel. all is good.

Feb 8 Crestview Fl. Comfort Inn Followed massive tornado but in sunshine all the way.

Feb 9 Thurs. Gainesville, Momma's house Yea!

Welcome home Laura and Hello Eleanor!

We're awaiting the arrival of the cross country traveling gals. They've done well. After three nights in California, in beautiful weather, they crossed thru to Arizona. Just as they'd passed by, a huge ice storm came through California with Icy roads and 50 car pile ups in the north and flooding around Fresno. They'd just missed it. In fact, were totally unaware of it. Thank God. When they got to East Texas heading for Louisiana, terrific tornados had just ripped towns apart causing major damage there. They were behind this one and, again, unaware of it. Thanks again to my wonderful Guardian Angels pulling double duty. Phfew.

Linda came down to see Laura and we all went to BJ's for dinner. It's been years since they've seen each other. Then we settled the girls in for the night. All four of them; Laura, Eleanor, Tupelo and Twyla.

Everyone slept like a pile of rocks. Early the next morning Kim arrived and whisked the girls off to Disney World, Leaving the pups with us, of course.

Seeing Disney World is Eleanor's Lifelong dream come true. Although Laura assured us she'd probably be ready to leave Disney after a couple hours and a nice lunch, they didn't get home till sometime after 11 that evening. They'd had a wonderful time. Kim and Laura had great fun that day and seemed to have ironed out many significant differences between themselves. I'm thrilled for everyone! The next morning, we saw Eleanor off at the local airport heading back to Portland, and Laura came back to our house for a quiet day and a half with us. . It was nice having her stay that extra day. The next morning she left for Sarasota to begin her new life.

On Valentine's Day Sam installed new blue lights outside for me. I'd been pining, or whining, for about a year now, Ever since the first set had to come down due to lack of participation on their part. I like the nice glow they give to the driveway and the walkway. Most of The neighbors seem to enjoy them also.

We had another cruise night at the rec center. Sam did the music again and folks danced all evening. I walked to the clubhouse with our new neighbors, Pam & Steve. He's in a motorized wheelchair so we walked up together and found a TABLE JUST off the dance floor where we could watch the action. I guess my jukin' days are numbered. Especially when the lights are so low I can't tell what everyone is doing out there. Sam KEEPS the music flowing as he ditty bops around entertaining everyone.

He's so funny.

Living in Sarasota now, Laura has her hands full with that house and her Dad. Her friends have been a tremendous help with fixing, painting, and getting rid of stuff. Kim spent one weekend there while they had a massive yard sale. I'm thrilled at how the girls are getting along. Laughing and giggling together like they never were able to do as kids. Then Sam and I drove down in the RV, parked it in the side yard, and did whatever we could to help things along. He put up light fixtures, hung rods and curtains in the

one room she'd claimed for herself, and got her TV and computer set up and ready for the cable people to come do their thing, .

We all went out for breakfast one morning and to a Japanese restaurant one evening. Wow! That was so delicious And we each took home another whole meal.

2017 March. in like a lamb. weather's been gorgeous. While storms, twisters and huge snows fly around the country, we luxuriate in mild temps and sunshine. Saturday Sam rode with friends to Daytona to map out his plans for bike week later this month. About 28 bikes are signed up to go to lunch that day and ride together. He took a Boys Day Out to make these arrangements. I stayed home catching up with house chores.

We went to the Flying Biscuit for breakfast with Kim and Young Sam and his Lizzie. She's adorable. Soon they'll be driving west where he'll be posted at Camp 29 Palms in California. Obviously their relationship has progressed quite a bit. He's now a Marine Sharpshooter, looking for action.

Daytona: We had Five Slingshots riding across the state to bike week. Then we were even more impressive with 27 Slings parading up and down the coast. We did the loop and up to Hidden Treasure Restaurant where an outdoor buffet was waiting for us. We were surprised when the Polaris marketing manager picked up the entire tab. Sam got a chance to talk with him and they were both pleased with how the group is growing and what he, Kevin, hoped to do with the Slingshots throughout the country. Sam was happy with the whole day. He puts a lot into organizing these outings and it was nice to get such confirmation from Polaris.

It's been five months now and our neighbor has never spoken to us. It's too bad. Last spring when we first met, everything seemed fine. Then we were gone all summer. Evidently she already had friends here when she moved in, and they have a different agenda than the rest of us. They make trouble for our Board of Directors and are creating a division in the community. Each

of the neighbors on our street has spoken to her, only to be rebuffed with a snippy reply. So we just don't bother.

Spring has sprung, the grass is riz. I wonder where the posies is.

The bird is on the wing! My word, How absurd! I thought the wing was on the bird!

It's been a pleasant winter, but most of the azaleas have dried up and died. I hired a landscaper to straighten up the yard. Besides the drought these past years, he says the plants are just old. Exposed roots from the many trees stick up as much as six inches. Real ankle busters. I determined to eliminate as many as possible without killing any trees. And then cover the ground with top soil. Sam brought me 67 bags of soil which I spread out in a troublesome area, making it nicer to walk on. Due to the multitude of trees, grass doesn't grow here, so I'm not planting any. I made a nice arrangement in one area with my old urn, my owl planter and pots of amaryllis. That'll have to do for yard art at this time.

One day we went to Saint Augustine. We learned something that day: park at the Ripley's Welcome Center and pay the price per person to see everything. It was Currently $15 each. , , for the trolley. It takes you everywhere all day long with informative narrations, and returns you to your car. If you park in the downtown garage it's much cheaper but you only see the shopping and dining area of St. Augustine. None of the historic sites.. The extra price for the two of us was well worth it. you can get off at each interesting place and take all day to see the whole city. Then hop on the next trolley. The drivers are full of information and we ended up right back at our car

That's definitely the way to go!.

2017 May. More yard work.

Back at our house: On the porch side we now have a low wall around the plants to hold rain water long enough for them to benefit from it. and in the front yard where I had spread so much top soil earlier, I finally called for help. My new landscaper took one look at the situation and had it all worked out in his head. He gave me an estimate and in a few days things were happening.

Where my lawn dropped off to a lower level, he filled it in to be a nice smooth rolling green with new sod edging. Very pretty and safe for walking on .

Meanwhile, Sam pointed out a big ugly dead tree breaking up the driveway. It's out of here! Boy, get us started and watch out!

Laura's working feverishly on the house in Sarasota. She's made tremendous progress. She'll sign next week on a new mortgage in her name along with her dad's.

He's scared her a time or two by not responding to her as he sat in his new lift chair. Facing the extra loud TV and his back to the kitchen, he sits and sleeps in this chair day and night. So she walked over to him and spoke rather loudly several times: Dad, Dad, this is a dead check! Are you alright?!

He's been difficult to deal with and doesn't want any changes or cleaning or anything done.

After renovating the two bedrooms, the little bathroom, and much of the kitchen, it was time to get rid of the old, horrendously filthy carpet in the living room. She would need help for this so Curtiss came from New York for several days to entertain Dad while workers dealt with it. They tore out the carpet and cleaned and polished the terrazzo floor hidden beneath. Kim, Sam & I went to see what had been done. A short but sweet visit.

My kids each have a terrific sense of humor. They're funny and fun to be with. We went to the Main Bar for the Italian Sandwich and laughed our sox off at everything. It was so refreshing to have all three of them together and I'm glad we came here for the day. Big Curt stayed home in peace and quiet. Young Curt got a chance to see what Laura's been dealing with. It's difficult but all will be fine when the house gets finished.

We got back to Gainesville just in time to watch a tree company with three huge trucks take down that dead tree that's wrecking our driveway. Then they cut off a humongous limb hanging over the garage roof. With their machinery they lifted that limb up and over everything and out of there. They also cleaned all the other trees and bushes on our property. We're neat and proper now… beautiful lawn, clean trees and healthy bushes.

A few days after Curtiss got home from Florida he landed in the hospital with Appendicitis. He had a rough time followed by surgery at 10pm one night and then four more painful days in the hospital. We were very worried that something else had gone wrong. Thank you, God, he's now home and healing.

On Mother's Day Kim presented me with a lovely photo taken the other day of all three of my grown up kids. It was enlarged and framed already and It's perfect on the credenza with other family pictures. A wonderful gift. Today she's going with us to our local live Theater to see Mousetrap, an Agatha Christie Mystery. Then to dinner at the Red Lobster.

We'll be leaving in the RV soon. We'll stay in PVC a few days before going up to this year's Slingshot rally. So there's lots going on.

Laura and her Dad signed new mortgage papers on the 15th, putting his house in both their names. Congrats Laura!!

Finally we're getting rain! The new lawn is loving it. Sam even mowed it the other day with his push mower. This is a corner lot on the main drag through our community, and really needed some attention. Stinky and Poo, our two precious little bear cubs, are still hanging onto a tree near the road And our white ceramic no name cat is still peering into the kitchen window. That's how people identify our house. The cat house.

may 26. we arrived in PVC toting a small refrigerator to put in the shed for drinks and ice cream. We secured it to Snazzy's trailer for the trip. All worked well and we had a fine 8hour ride in perfect, cool weather. Sunday we went to Helen with Nan and Bob where we satisfied our need for the Reuben sandwich and on Monday we left for North Carolina and the 2017 Slingshot Rally.

We settled in just as it began to sprinkle. We met neighbors Jim & Ann and their 5 year old twins, Sofia and Nathan. A lovely family. Days later when Sam had gone off by himself they invited me to share breakfast with them. Very sweet people.

We registered at the rally, had breakfast at Joe's Pancakes and then rode with some buddies to Pigeon Forge. We rode the new Alpine Coaster Linda told me about. A wild ride, Not for the feint of heart. we loved it!

Wednesday's agenda included a hot dog cookout Sam planned for our buddies. We all met at "the farm" down the road from our campground. Then, as he usually plans things, he led everyone to several overlooks and waterfalls and ended up at the Smoke Mont pavilion for our lunch. There were 11 of us. Everyone enjoyed it as we sat around chatting for a few hours in a nice, relaxed mode. It was more comfortable than a restaurant. It turned out to be a wonderful gathering and we all agreed we need to do more picnic style lunches in the future.

2017 June. Our fourth day here at Smoke Mont National Park. my day off. Sam decided early on he wanted to concentrate more on making videos with his drone this year rather than taking part in all the rides. So this morning he left early with his drone while I stayed in camp catching up with these journals. There's no phone or internet service so I couldn't do any of that. That's somewhat of a blessing. Camping here costs a whopping 10 bucks per night and it's such a beautiful place. I do feel a little guilty and even a little anxious about not talking with family and friends, but everyone seems to survive without my two cents worth. That evening we sat around our neighbor's campfire with them. Sam demonstrated his drone. The kids were enthralled and couldn't wait to see themselves on YouTube!

On Friday he left early to catch the start of the Slingshots. He videoed the vendors and whatever else was going on at that time. He met a new fellow drone pilot and brought him and his wife home for lunch. Jim & Gail Adams had hot dogs with us here at the rig. They invited us to their farm to camp for a few days. Sounds like a nice idea. She and I got along famously.

Saturday was the rally grand finale. After the poker run, there was a contest to select the finest Slingshot. My friend Dawn and I browsed the shops a bit and then WATCHED the big parade. Later we all met for dinner at The Legends Bar and Grill. Everyone had the fish n chips; two delicious huge fish for each of us. Chatting went on till it was nearly dark out. We needed to get over the mountain and get Snazzy loaded up. Rain was predicted overnight and we didn't want to do that on a rain slick trailer in the morning. Goodnights and goodbyes were said and off we went.

When we arrived at our campsite it was pitch black. We got Snazz up on her trailer and began taking stuff into the rig. Sam carefully removed his drone from its hidey hole when Suddenly he realized the iPad he uses with the drone wasn't there. Oh no! He Can't even call anyone to ask about it. The I Pad IS the phone! All those important passwords and info is on there… Oh geez. Someone's not going to sleep tonight.

At daybreak, come rain or shine, he'd have to go back over the mountain in search of it.

Oh, lucky day! someone turned it in to Ivor.

Sam thinks he set it on Snazzy's rooster tail as he loaded things up yesterday, Then he took off without putting it away. Thank heaven for the good people in the world.

So we had a lovely week there in North Carolina with old and new friends. perfect weather, lots of video for Sam to put on Facebook and YouTube, and new Slingshot Tee shirts.

Just as we left the park Sunday morning, the rain started. It came down hard but we had no trouble tooling along. We filled up with gas and vittles at our local Ingles Grocery Store in Cleveland. Then as we were unhooking from the motor home in our own lot ,Floyd came by and asked if we'd like

him to tow the trailer to its designated space in the parking lot. And just like that, we were settled in for the summer.

Sarasota: Laura's been working like the devil on that house. And thanks to her good friend, Matt, for putting in so many hours cleaning, painting, demolishing, renovating and so much more, they've made 2 bedrooms, the bathroom, and the living room livable. Now they are practically replacing the kitchen. She's working at the Sarasota Circuit Court 40 hours per week while dealing with a stubborn father and working on these projects. I just hope she doesn't have an ulcer or a heart attack. Take it easy, Laura!

Georgia. It's always great to be back in Paradise Valley. except for the mosquitos! I can't leave the rig in the morning until I've doused myself with bug spray. But it's great to be here. We went to Blairsville with a bunch of the bike gang one day and another day to Dahlonega to the Irish pub with Nan, bob and her son Ron. Today we had an indoor picnic at their rig followed by a trip to DQ! All yummy.

Busy weekend. Kim and Laura hooked up in Gainesville and drove to PVC on Friday. Mick & Maureen arrived later at a place they had rented and we all went to check it out. what a terrific hideaway ! This 3Bedroom/2Bath cottage is built right into the mountain side and has all sorts of amenities. even a lower level for games and recreation. All for only 120 bucks per night. They'd invited the girls to stay the nights with them. Saturday morning at our rig, after breakfast prepared over the fire, Mick, Mo and Kim went off to hike Dukes Creek. Later we all went to Helen for snacks and browsing. On Sunday we had breakfast at Wendel's followed by a few hours in Dahlonega. We visited stores I'd never been in before. That evening we met again at their Mountain Hideaway where we made tacos and just enjoyed each other's company till very late that evening. . It had been over 10 years since Mick & Mo had seen the girls and they'd requested they try to be here. it was wonderful.

Kim was awarded the “Nurse of the Year” Award for the Oncology floor.

She casually mentioned this one day, saying she needed to take some clothes to work to have her picture taken. Then one evening, as she was walking to her car after watching a movie with us, she mentioned she was to attend a reception the next evening in which she would be honored.

What?! I was surprised. I had no idea anything was being planned. I said “Oh Kim I should be there. Shouldn’t I have known about this so I could be there? This is a great honor for you! I’m so proud of you!!.” Since then, little by little, she’s divulged more info about it. She just does not talk about herself. There were other recipients from other departments of the hospital at this function also. They had her come up to the front of the audience and some of her coworkers had the most wonderful things to say about her and about her work ethic for the past 30 years. I, her Mother, had no idea how involved she is with her patients: how she’d give up a Saturday for someone who needed chemo that day, how she’d visit her patients when they get moved upstairs as an in-patient, or to hospice, and even when they go home for the end of their life. She brings small gifts to coworkers as well. And besides all that, she’s an excellent nurse!

Later I heard that corporate was there to thank her for all she’s done for the hospital and the patients. Her coworkers proclaimed she should have received this recognition several times over. She’s always been totally dedicated.

Kim, I’m so happy for you and very, very proud of you. I love you.

Nancy & Bob helped me celebrate another birthday with a Filet Mignon at Texas Roadhouse. Then we went to Coles where everyone came out with a prize or two except Sam. He was so busy running back and forth finding things for us and all he got was the bill!

Just kidding. But never fear for Sam…

The very next day we were at the Polaris dealership at the Mall of Georgia where he actually parted with his precious 2015 Snazzy, and we brought home a beautiful 2017 version!

SnazzyII is a gorgeous midnight Cherry Slingshot with many new features Sam had read about. He's in 7th heaven! His own birthday, which is 25 days from now, has begun!

2017 July. Lots of rain lately. Been having dinners with Nan & Bob quite often. Florida friends Gene & Sue, came up in their royal blue Slingshot for a few days. We got several good rides in between storms and They experienced some real driving in these hills! In Highlands we had lunch at the Ugly Dog, and got home by 3 so they could prepare for their ride south. Then Nan & Bob came over for cherry coke floats with black cherry frozen yogurt! OMG!

It was so good we each had to have two bowls full. Uh uh uh!

Thinking of goodies, Nan introduced us to a new DQ item… the Midnight Mocha frappé. It's fabulous! . Now all our friends are going for it at the D Q.

Kim made a quick visit over the weekend. She drove up on Saturday and back home On Sunday. She picked up a cute designer bench she saw last month when she was here. Didn't want to wait till November, when we could've brought it back with us. While here, we took her to Gustav's in Dahlonega for pizza. Great college town atmosphere and terrific pizza. Then we browsed next door at the General Store and she found all sorts of stuff to take back for friends.

Nan wanted a chance to visit with Kim before she left the area so we met the next morning at Wendel's for breakfast. It was nice.

SnazzyII hit the 500 mile mark so Sam cleared off the little concrete slab at the bottom of the RV steps and proclaimed it a work bay. He changed her oil and She's officially broken in now! He can drive her however he wants.

I'm sitting here in the rig on a foot stool as I write this. Waiting for the delivery of a new chair. I don't think I mentioned that the nice brown, stress less chair I had in the rig last year went back into the house. We put the original broken white chair back into the rig to try out where the couch used to be.

I was using it in my office and thought it might be alright for me in the rig. . But, alas, it really is shot! It's lying here on the floor on its side like a dead horse. Anyway, its outa here, in pieces! I'm hoping the guys will drag it out of the rig when they get here. , We went shopping yesterday at the Cleveland Furniture Outlet and found this comfy new chair. It's a silvery greenish fabric, squishy and cozy. It swivels, rocks, reclines, And will be very pretty in the rig. I say C'mon, guys. Bring it on!

It's here! Took the guys 5 minutes to pull out the old and bring in the new. Happy, happy day.

Great weekend with Nan & Bob at the Hiawassee summer fair. we Did lunch at our favorite nook, tramped around the exhibits and went to the performance in the hall. The warm up group was terrific. A local blue grass bunch called Home Grown. they were great.

Crystal Gayle was super, also. She was filling in for Brenda Lee and informed us that her real name was also Brenda but she had to change it because Brenda Lee was already a recognized artist. Who knew? .

Sunday we all went to a play:42nd Street. Lots of singing and tap dancing. Then we ate at Shenanigan's on the patio. Later Nancy had us over for cake and ice cream for our birthdays. white wedding cake with our names on it in pink and blue, delicious. She's so sweet.

This summer has been hot and humid with a blast of rain nearly every day. Since we have only SnazzyII to get around in, we're lucky to have Nan's car to count on when necessary.

2017 August. One day we hightailed it to Cherokee to meet Curtiss, Haley & Grey for lunch. They'd driven from New York for a family gathering in Gatlinburg with her brothers and their families. They had a few free days so we met at Paul's Restaurant for lunch. Then we went to 'The Farm' where we could wander around the grounds and let Grey run his little legs off. It was good to see them, even for just those few hours. Next month Grey will be 4 and start pre k. He's a typical boy, smart as a whip, full of energy, quite a handful and just adorable.

Sam’s anxious about not receiving his official license tag for SnazzyII yet. The temporary tag expires in five days and no one knows where the new one is! He spent a couple hours on the phone after learning that the licensing was being done in Broward County; not in Alachua county as we figured it would be. One guy completed the work but just left it on his desk. His super was livid and his name is now Mud!

Strange summer, too much rain. I douse myself with bug spray every morning. Either we use Nan’s car or we all do our errands together.

If we settle down on the swing for a bit suddenly its raining again! There’s no camp fire, No outdoor group gatherings, Too hot. Too buggy. Too rainy. Socializing is practically nil. But when we do have a chance to get together lately, our friends seem to want to talk only about politics. Not our cuppa. Personally, I’d rather stay indoors, cuddled in my new chair, with music in the background and listen to a book. And I love hearing the rain on the RV roof, Especially when it’s gentle enough to open a window. Sam’s always content to be buried in his computer . We’re well matched.

Oh, speaking of the RV… Nan gave me the most adorable PJ’s for my birthday. With all sorts of RV’s in the pattern. it reads across the shirt: R V THERE YET?

NEWSFLASH! On August 21,2017, Monday afternoon, we had a total eclipse of the sun.

Sam made a unique video here in Paradise Valley with his drone showing the local mountains and our campground as we went from light to dark and back to light. I don’t think even the NASA coverage showed the effect that the eclipse had on people on the ground. They stick to the sun and moon. Sam’s video , shows how the area changed as it took on a different hue, how it actually got dark, yet you could see the light at the horizon off in the

distance, like looking out from under an umbrella. and how street lights began to come on, one by one, and then go off again. It includes some of our friends using the occasion for partying. Plus, his video is played against some great music

My kids are doing well. Curt started a new job in New York recently and feels it's a positive change. . Laura's Working with a money manager getting those duckies lined up. Work on her house has slowed down now that the main living quarters have been cleaned and renovated to her satisfaction. But there's still a long way to go.

Kim's been offered the position of manager in her department at the hospital. She did the required application forms and is now on hold. She's not quite sure she wants this position since it means more work on a computer and being in charge while she'd rather work with patients and actually nurse. So, we'll see how it pans out. later: Kim accepted the job offered her as head of the infusion room. She was happy about it and she'll be great in this new position.

Meanwhile, the weather took over the news media. Hurricane Harvey hit the south west coast of Texas displacing over thirty thousand people. Everything was washed away. Refinery plants exploded in flames. 30 to 40 inches of rain fell in just a few days. Houston's trying to cope with the homeless. The Colonial Pipeline is shut down so no gas is coming to the east coast. Prices will soon reflect this.

2017 September. . A nice, cool, rainy Friday morning. Who would have guessed what a strange time we were entering. We were Catching some of the outer bands of Hurricane Harvey as it moved toward Tennessee. Texas will never be the same. Over a million people being moved about in temporary quarters. Ranches and animals, gone. So many people, too poor to even run. The city of Houston under water. Wow.

Irma is Another horrendous hurricane to worry about as it was already a category 5 while it battered the islands around Florida. It's Expected to hit Miami and cut right up through the center of the state. . Miami's practically evacuated. Of course, I'm worried about Laura, her dad and the pups. Kim and Alex are in Gainesville with just as much possible danger. Guardian Angels, are you listening? Hurricane Jose is now a category 4 in the Caribbean. Both the girls have been excused from their jobs for the duration and are home with family and pets. That's a relief.

The 11th. Everyone got through the massive hurricane alright last night. Irma's been deemed a tropical storm and is still working her way up to us here in Georgia. Nan & Bob left PV to go to Ronny's house in NC. I don't blame them as their little trailer has no generator and it would not withstand high winds. Our day was quiet but rainy and cool. After daylight faded, the wind picked up as Irma finally made it up to visit us. We had some heavy gusts that rocked the rig a bit but no damage. Power went out at 8pm so we listen to our books a while and went to sleep. It settled down around 11.

Tuesday, the 12th. No power. Much of the county is out due to downed trees. Becca and Linda next door are ok. We have the generator so will have power if we need it.

Oops. Spoke too soon. We lost power around noon. Started the generator and Sam went out scouting the area. A very tall tree behind our rig was topped last night. It landed right next to SnazzyII! but Another tree landed on someone's rig, They weren't home at the time

. Shortly after Sam returned, things started happening here … First the dashboard radio, which was not even turned on at the time, made a loud pop, then there was an explosive pop outside and something smelled very hot next to my chair in the rig. We shut everything down and began searching. Several of the so called 'safety power strips' were burning up. The smell was horrible. Then it seemed that the generator was running but not putting out any power. About an hour later Sam had figured out several things and we were mostly up and running. minus all the electrical plugs we were used to using. Then the local power magically came on and things were running again except Only half the generator, the AC part, worked. He'll look into this later. He suggested we head back to Florida right then.

But I don't think they had any electric in our community there yet, either. So, one lesson here is… get rid of those power strips. They don't shut down

when overheated! They just spark and pop and burn up, possibly causing fires. It's a scary thing. It was fortunate that this happened while we were here and awake. It turns out that only our part of the campground had any restored power. Everyone across the creek was without electric for 5 more days. Their water system didn't work either. That had to be miserable. While most of White county was out of order, we were just very lucky.

Linda & Ron made their yearly trek to their favorite campground near Cherokee and they love their new 5th wheel. We met up with them a couple times during this vacation and We'll all be home in Florida in a few weeks.

October, 2017. Still in PVC, Georgia.

So far this month we've just been waiting and watching the weather. Another tropical storm, Nate, came up the Gulf and headed right for us but wasn't too bad. We'd planned on this week for Florida Slingshot friends to come up and ride with us. thirteen Slings and one motorcycle met in our yard that morning. Good to see the friends from the Ocala area; Greg & Loella, John & Sherri, and a new couple Sharon& Rob from the Villages. We rode to Nantahala today. After a threatening morning with grey skies and mist in the air, it was a gorgeous day. We browsed the store at the Nantahala Gorge and got back to PVC around 4. After an hour or so of R& R, we coerced everyone to get dinner on. They were very willing and soon we had burgers, dogs and Italian sausage grilling up a storm. I had potato salad and deviled eggs ready and we warmed up pork n beans to top it off. Our last picnic feast of the year was a good day!

Friday the 13th. Surprise. I thought Wednesday was the last hurrah, but today nearly topped it. Eight slings rode over J Bridge Road and on to Ammacalola State Park. Then down to the falls and up to the lodge we went. Then on to Burk's farm where everyone was amazed at the size and the quantity of the pumpkins. Thousands of them! pumpkins As far as the eye could see!

I brought home some Indian corn and colorful squash for the table. Then we went on to Johnny B's for lunch. Our group included Loella & Greg, Stu, Sherri & John, Diane & Gary, Curt, and Bernie. So, even though the week was cut short by rain, we had a wonderful time together and were exhausted by Friday afternoon.

Saturday, after attending the season's last PVC board meeting we went with Nan & Bob to the festivities at the Hardman Farm. We finished the day with our favorite D Q treat ,a Midnight Mocha Frappe . Then another cold snap with 40degree mornings and bright sunny afternoons.

Finally one evening we had the first campfire of this entire season. Nan & Bob enjoyed it with us. Later we heard the weather forecast and decided to head back to Florida ASAP. The next week would have been our last, anyway, but it was going to get colder and more rainy. We all packed and were ready Saturday and had one last fire and gathering that evening. We'd leave in the morning. Nan & Bob were here and Becca came by for one last glass of wine.

It was a Nice ride to Gainesville, Florida. Parked the rig in Shirley's drive, hooked Snuggy up to the Jeep and just left things for morning. Ate some chili, showered and went to bed. Exhausted.

Getting too old for this.

November 1 2017. Linda turned 70 today. We got together for lunch and a bit of shopping.

Oh No. My brother Steve is having a terrible time again. They've discovered an inoperable cancer of his lung lining. This is unrelated to that fall he had last year that left him with double vision. He certainly has a rough life.

We attacked the yard work again … Sam blew the roof clean and we filled every container we have. The next day, of course, I was at the back o crackers office!

We rode with friends to “Shrimps R Us”. Beautiful weather and fun to see the old friends and make more new ones. Kim spent Thanksgiving Day in Sarasota with Laura and their dad

Just a Note: A day or two before Thanksgiving, I set up my tree and the wall art over the credenza and Sam decorated outside. This is mentionable because in the past several years I’ve wanted nothing to do with the holidays; almost to the point of being angry about having to participate.

But 2017 brought many changes to my family: Curtiss has a better job with higher pay and work he likes. Kim accepted a promotion at the hospital and it’s working out well. and Laura gave up on the West and moved back to Florida. Everyone seems happier and getting along better than any time in many years. Hallelujah!

December 2017. Lovely day . 75 degrees.

Sam’s busy installing things on SnazzyII, checking them out for Twist Dynamics for sales at their store.

Laura and the pups came up for a couple days to celebrate Kim’s 54th birthday. Red Lobster showed us a wonderful time again. Lots of laughs. It’s so great to see the girls get along so well. (This has not always been the case due to life’s accidents and idiosyncrasies.)

I’ve been busy downloading books from the National Library Service to my computer. Thanks to Sam for teaching me how to do this, I now have 30 books ready to go onto my player.

We went to Sarasota to have Christmas with Laura and her dad but the day before we arrived he fell and broke his hip. Curtiss and family flew down to visit him and have Christmas with us.

They arrived at Laura’s after a visit with HIM in the hospital. We had a nice evening together around the dining table, munching and talking while Grey, 4, sang the entire theme song from the Mary Tyler Moore Show. It was clear and in perfect pitch. He’s a great kid, quick witted and happy.

Before long we were exhausted and excused ourselves to retire to the rig. Nice thing about bringing your own bedroom. Tomorrow's Christmas. Gotta be up early to see if Santa finds Grey.

Christmas day 2017. Yes, Santa found Grey. What with everyone visiting big Curt in the hospital and attending to the cooking, we eventually sat down to enjoy two delicious home made lasagna dinners. One was white Chicken breast bites, cheeses, mushrooms and gluten free noodles. and the other was a regular style lasagna. Both delicious. At Jo Toe's the next day Matt and Kathi joined us. She was thrilled to see Curtiss: he's still Corky to her, much to his chagrin. We all had another good time.

The next four days Sam and I worked at clearing stuff out of the area slated to become the master bathroom. Curt has lived in this house over 20 years: the mess can't be imagined. Laura's done a great job clearing out so much of it this year, but the entire back yard, the garage and one big bedroom are still packed to the hilt! We found 5 loaded guns in different locations in the remaining rooms. He said there are 7 altogether. Hoo boy.

Two truckloads of stuff have already been taken to the landfill. The rest are large objects like lawn mowers, wheelbarrows, shower doors, electrical boxes, and even an old car partially sunken into the

ground.

One day we came across a package from Domestications. A new set of king size sheets with pillow cases and matching bedspread with shams. all in a beautiful giraffe print. Dated six years earlier and still in the manufacturer's packaging. Laura said I should take them as her Dad was not ever going to use that room or the bed as He lives day and night in his new lift chair they had procured for him.

Well, thank you Laura and big Curt.

New Year’s Eve.

We’re going to dinner with Linda& Ron in his truck. I was trying to get into the back seat of it. but The first step up is way above my knees! With one foot on the step, I jumped and pulled on the overhead strap but I couldn’t GET into that truck! I jumped and pulled and began to giggle. I just couldn’t do it. ! I told Ron I’m too old for this. Did this truck come with a ladder? He brought me a step stool. Later Linda and I had filets while the guys had their favorites ,

rib eye steaks. As usual, we were home by 7 and sound asleep as another new year rolled in.

2018 January. New Years Day. We’re in a deep freeze! Temps from 20 to 45 degrees. Sam put notice out canceling todays ride. But still, we count our blessings; some folks were under six feet of snow!

We brought Big Bertha to the house where we could plug her in and run the furnaces to keep her pipes from freezing. I was surprised no one came to say we couldn’t have her here that long. Rules, you know. She was in our drive for six days with her tail end sticking out in the street. Temps nearly dipped into the teens every night for about 8 hours each. That could have done some real damage since we hadn’t actually winterized her. Finally it warmed up a bit and Big Bertha went back to her slot across the highway.

We stay home and away from others while this horrible flu bug is knocking everyone for a loop. They say this is the worst epidemic in nearly a hundred years. In fact, it was one hundred years ago, 1918&19, that the Spanish Flu hit our country, and ultimately the world. My own Grandmother died in that epidemic when her daughter, my Mom, was just 4 years old.

Laura’s excited with the progress happening at her Sarasota house. Besides Matt working his butt off, our friend, Dan, has been invaluable with his big truck. They’ve already carted several loads away. He’s a contractor and has been working with Matt and the plumber.

Things are moving quickly. The other day they discovered an entire patio buried right behind the house!

Meanwhile, big Curt had a bit of a setback while in rehab and he’s in a facility closer to the house now which is good for everyone.

We’re In Gainesville, Fla. I’m so happy about my kids relationships with each other. They’re in touch almost daily and many difficulties have disappeared. What a relief.

2018 February. I decided to spend these cold days cleaning my files. It’s slow work, but somebody’s gotta do it! I realized I had TONS OF useless, obsolete files. Into the shredder they went. Two waste baskets full of shreds later, I’m about one quarter through the drawer. Hoo boy! And when I say ‘looking around’, it’s no easy feat. Sheet by sheet, I place one into the printer, click a few buttons, then listen while my computer reads the page aloud. If it’s not an active file it goes through the shredder. Its slow going but satisfying. What could be more fun during these cold, soggy days?

Oh my Gosh! February 10,2018. Big Curt passed away this morning!

After breaking a hip in December he was doing great In a rehab facility and on his way to full recovery. Curtiss Milo Venn was 76. While he was absent from the house they shared, Laura was working feverishly to complete a new bathroom and bedroom for him. Now he won’t even get to see it, She cried. It was so sad.

Thus ended a tumultuous relationship between each of the kids and their father. They were upset and sad that this happened just as relationships were being mended. He was expected home within the next 10 days. Kim surmises that an embolism may have caused the sudden passing. He was doing well, joining in puttputt golf and karaoke. Everyone was shocked.

Since he'd stipulated his body be donated to science, everything was taken care of at the center. No funeral or cremation planned. The kids will have a memorial service later.

We went to the library to get our taxes done this year. An interesting, and free, experience. I must not have been paying enough taxes and kept getting letters from the IRS to SEND MORE MONEY! So I told John Hancock to keep more of my money each month and give it to the IRS. Obviously, they think they need it more than they think I do!

On February 29 I Had a nice chat with Kathi Ann, the birthday girl. She's doing good. Has a kitten named Tanzi; a wild little thing who's lots of entertainment for her.

Speaking of entertainment: Sam just ran in here from the grocery store. he went shopping with no cash or cards or even drivers license! They're holding the groceries for him.

Ain't it hell getting old!

2018 March. In like a lamb… A gorgeous day here in Gainesville. I treated Sam to lunch today for all the things he does around the house. We tried a new Cuban place called Mi Apa, and we loved it. Later, we ran into Alex at the credit union as he put money in and we withdrew some. It was neat to see him out doing his errands like an adult. Later we realized Sam had paid for the lunch! Do I know how to play my cards, or what?

Sunday we rode to Cedar Key with a mixed troop of Slingshots and Harleys. A fun ride. Then we left town in the Jeep for Sarasota, towing SnazzyII. Laura ordered Chinese meals from her favorite place. At the new Macy's we

found a super sale on a mattress for her and Later we met Matt and Sam at the Packinghouse Grille for dinner.

Saturday Sam and I rode with a troop of Slings. We paraded through downtown Sarasota, to Saint Armand's Circle, and on to the Tiki Restaurant. Two of the guys wives don't ride so they go to functions together. Everyone refers to them as Kurt and Berny. Chatting with them for the first time I Mistakenly called them burt and Kerney. They got new nicknames that day!

Sunday started out nice and easy. No itinerary. Yea!

Laura went with us to the old Sarasota Square Mall. This is the last place I worked for Maas Brothers cum Macy's many years ago. To our surprise, there was no longer a Macy's there either.

Just then Laura got a call that someone was at her house, ready to tow that Mustang out of the yard. We rushed home. This '94 vehicle has been there so many years it was sunk in the ground so deep the doors couldn't even be opened. Every day, workers come or go or not show up or come by anyway or whatever. So much work is being done, inside and out. Each room's been updated. The walk in master bath now has two shower heads and a Slipper tub, a new window and new floors. The bedroom has French doors to an enclosed garden that wraps around to the back yard for the pups to run. It's close to completion and she's soooo ready!

That evening was the big finale. Laura and I shared taking Sam, Matt, Dan and wife Jen to dinner at Philippi Creek Oyster Bar. It was terrific with tiny fried fish, shrimp, a bucket of low country boil, all kinds of other seafood goodies, and of course oysters! . A great party.

A few days later Floyd & Karen called as they were passing through Gainesville on their way from Georgia to south Florida. We spent the afternoon together and they stayed the night, talking and laughing about everything after sharing a few glasses of wine. They're special people and we loved having them stop by.

Another day we rode that curvy, pretty Ozella Trail with Linda & Ron to Pecks Seafood Restaurant in Crystal River. Great ride and Good Grouper.

One evening a hired DJ had music playing in high gear at our rec center. We met and chatted with many new neighbors. It was noisy but a fun time. Later several people told Sam they missed his music. For so many years he was the DJ at these parties but tonight he enjoyed attending and being free to visit everyone all evening. And it was nice to go home when we were ready.

Easter and April Fools Day! Nice Florida weather. Kim stayed after dinner to watch a movie with us. Sally Field was adorable in "Hello, My Name Is Doris". n older lady has a crush on a young co worker. Cute and entertaining but hard to comprehend that Sally Field could be the older lady!

I started a book by Maeve Binchy and was telling Sam that years ago on a tour in Ireland our driver pointed out Maeve Binchy's house as we rode by it. Since then Sam and I have visited Eugenia Price's Saint Simons Island, Laura Ingalls childhood home, had a tour of Louisa May Alcott's home and Nathaniel Hawthorne's house next door, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's place nearby. In Salem, Mass. We toured the home of Hawthorne's sister where he often stayed. It always feels good to visit a home where a famous author lived and wrote. Florida, and especially the Sarasota area, is home to many well known authors.

Sam & I took a day off-off what, I don't know. We rode Snazzy to Saint Augustine for lunch. It was so pleasant going it alone. We found several shops and restaurants we'd never seen before. Amazing. It became blustery and cool but luckily didn't rain while we were out. . A gorgeous day.

2018 May. hurray! Hurray! The First of May, outdoor intercourse starts today

I greeted Jane again with this line first thing this morning. It was so nice to hear her laugh.

Young Sam and Lizzie set their wedding date for July 14,this year, at the Gainesville Garden Club.

I'm excited. I have an appointment with a window guy about replacing the horrible, old fashioned rusty window over our kitchen sink. I want one that will open easily to let fresh air in even if it's raining. The current one is an ancient, rusty window box, for displaying things. YUCK! Its out of here! A few days later I talked with a rep here in my kitchen. What I thought might be a 400 dollar investment is actually a 1400 dollar whim! But I went for it. It'll be installed in June. Replacing a top and a bottom window, this will be one tall clear glass pane with a crank to open the whole thing from the bottom out. It's very easily opened without straining a back muscle. It comes with lifetime guarantees. I can't wait!

Meanwhile, Sam's daughter Debbie stopped by with her family for the night on their way south. We had a huge pot of chili ready just in case we got rained in. Which we did! And that made for an even better visit. Debbie told about her dealings all these years with getting a new school up and running at her church.

One day at work recently Kim was summoned to the 5th floor where many hospital big wigs were assembled. She was presented the Daisy Award, a most prestigious award in recognition of her excellent nursing all these years! Many of her extra curricular activities were mentioned and everyone applauded her. It was wonderful. Of course, she was embarrassed, but it's great to have your good deeds recognized.

Oops. Don’t know what happened. Suddenly we’re transported forward several weeks into Georgia.

Happy to have Nancy & Bob here finally. . We had strawberry shortcake at their place one evening and Pizza night at Big Daddy’s the next. That Friday we all went to Highlands to do some browsing. On the way we ate lunch at the Cupboard in Dillard where we always enjoy their novelties and the hilarious cards in the gift shop. Sam came across a beautiful, congratulatory card that made us think of Kim, so we sent it to her. Had a Midnight Mocha Frappe at DQ. A fun day.

Sunday we went to a musical play at the Holly Theater. The Children’s Workshop put on “Once on An Island. These kids were talented high school students with the most beautiful voices.

Afterword at Gustavo’s I had a lovely white wine sangria while Nan nearly got plastered on a margarita.

2018 JuneTuesday, Happy Birthday Gail! Sentiments repeated in several phone calls. We celebrated outside at the picnic table with grilled hot dogs Topped off with my favorite cake-Pepperidge Farms frozen white cake with cocoanut icing and creamy vanilla bean ice cream. Haven’t had this in 15 years and it was fabulous! Nan read the card Kim sent and it warmed my heart to hear what she felt. Then Sam read a card from himself. He prefaced it by saying that some people just can’t express their feelings but here he had found the perfect card. It was so lovely both Nan and I were in tears by the time he finished reading it.

Today we went for a ride in Nan’s new rental car, a brand new Nissan Rogue. Their own car cannot be driven until new airbags are installed and none are currently available. Ford’s paying for everyone to rent a car in the meantime. We went to Batesville General Store for lunch then browsed the shops in Sautee. Another nice day with our friends.

2018 July. We're back in Florida for the kids wedding. My kitchen window was installed and it's perfect. I love it!

Friday. Wedding rehearsal day. Laura arrived around 2pm (with no puppies) and we met Kim at the Gainesville Garden Club at 4. The 'best man' was on duty as a fireman so Sam stood in for him at the rehearsal. afterward everyone moved on to Napolitano's for dinner and a presentation Kim had prepared. Although she claims to be technically challenged, she presented a terrific video of young Sam's life. She narrated the sequence, sharing her feelings of each photo. an excellent program. It was so beautiful, many of us were in tears. A truly memorable gathering.

Saturday September 14,2018. Young Sam and Lizzy's Wedding Day.

Curtiss, Haley & Grey arrived from Tampa. We scrambled, pressing clothes, showering, and getting dress for the afternoon wedding.

Although everyone was hoping for an outdoor garden wedding, plans were changed two days earlier due to the whims of Mother Nature. the 5 o'clock rains that evening were right on time, just as the vows were being spoken. They say rain on a wedding is good luck. The Garden Club was perfect for this occasion. One room was set up for the actual wedding while a larger room was prepared for the reception. The food was wonderful, followed by an open mike segment. Lizzie, tall and slim, was gorgeous in her size 2 gown and young Sam was equally beautiful. Several people spoke about the bride and groom and made nice toasts. Lizzie's Dad danced with her to a heart warming song about his little girl. Then Kim was called up to the mike. Oh my goodness. A tear jerker. She spoke very quietly and deliberately, almost on the verge of tears herself. After a bit about Sam, she said; "and now he has another woman in his life…pause, pause, pause. and that is as it should be."

Then the music began for her to dance with her Sam. It was Carol Burnett's I'm so glad we had this time together. I nearly cried out loud. She hugged her Sam through the entire song and he asked her a couple times if she was alright. Oh my goodness. After that, her Sam, now Lizzie's Sam,

had the mike and told us stories of their meeting and engagement. Some fun things they had enjoyed and how she had helped him through a very rough patch.

Then he turned to her and said, “I love you.

It was Absolutely gripping.

Now Big Sam was getting tired. And he was tired of waiting for the cake. He stood up, saying he’d get us a couple slices! He was actually up and on his way! We shouted “No Sam! They have to cut the cake first!” he saw the beautiful three tiered cake and finally realized the folly of his actions. He fell back into his chair, laughing, almost hysterically, and soon the whole table was laughing.

He couldn’t believe what he was about to do.

Meanwhile, Grey has fallen in love with Reddi Whip. He calls it whooped cream. It’s good on bananas but even better shot right into the mouth! Such a beautiful little boy.

At our community pool we had a good workout. Grey swims like a fish. It doesn’t matter if he’s in the shallow or deep end since he can’t reach the bottom of either. He swam constantly. I was exhausted just watching him.

Laura left for home after lunch and Curtiss and family went off to visit friends.

The next morning the house was organized chaos, a Chinese fire drill! Everybody going from cars to bedrooms to the washer and dryer, and back to cars. Curtiss & family left around 10 and we were just a half hour later. The ride up to PVC in Georgia was great, cloudy but no rain; easy on the eyes. But a couple hours into the trip, I began to wonder about my little red pouch that’s filled with my life’s blood: chargers, headsets, batteries and their charger, memory cards, and both my Pen Friends! I’m lost without this stuff and I didn’t remember actually putting it into any of our bags. I hoped it was still home on the bed where I last worked with it.

the next day we emptied the car and it definitely was not with us. Darn. Kim stopped by the house and Viola! There it was. Oh, thank you Tony.

Saint Anthony never fails. Now, if the USPS can follow through, I'll soon be reunited with my precious stuff.

Thursday the 19th. We had a Short sweet time with Curtiss's family here in Georgia. This was their first visit to our property. They arrived in the evening with Grey sound asleep. They'd been visiting friends and he'd been swimming with them all afternoon in Lake Nataly. The other kids are 11 and they were having a blast jumping off an 11foot pier, into the lake. Grey had no problem with that. he could jump and swim as well as they could, So again and again he went into the water. He loved it! No one could believe he was not even 5 years old! Later, when they were resting, laying around playing on their cell phones, there was Grey right in the middle of them, playing a computer game on his toy. What a kid!

After breakfast we escorted them to Clayton and highway 441 by way of the backroads Sam knows so well. From there they were on their way to more adventures of their own. And we were on our own as well.

We old folks went home and crashed for a couple hours.

Friday. So much for settling down… we went to Hiawassee to the fair with Nan & bob, and Ron & Mia. We stopped at a booth with the leather goods we've been looking for; pouches with hooks that you attach to your belt loops to carry necessary items when out riding. We call them sidewinders. I bought a very pretty black one, Nancy and Mia each got grey ones. After searching for them several years, finally, here were some really nice ones! Later at the Florida Mountain Restaurant, I toasted Ronnie on having had a three day vacation with NO RAIN! This just never happens for him .

Sunday, July 22. Happy Birthday Sam. He caught up to me…74! He wanted a rest day so we hung around the rig cooking chicken parts in a bucket. His latest endeavor.

With three cake racks stacked under a galvanized bucket, he cooked wings and legs. we picnicked with mac n cheese, pork n beans, and corn on the cob. Later DQ supplied us with luscious desserts. yummy.

One day we met with friends from Tennessee and showed them around our playground: a quick trip through PVC, a race up Blood Mountain and shopping at the Crossing store up there, a stop at Two Wheels Only, A super ride on highways 180 and 60, to Mercier's for lunch, and then goodbye as they went on to Tennessee. Fab weather and fun folks.

Things were pretty quiet around here for a while after that: I did laundry and made our beefaroni meal. We got haircuts one day and breakfast at the Huddle House. Then back home as Sam was pooped. A little under the weather.

2018 August. Well, heck! Sam's back to normal and now I feel punk. He seemed to have a bit of food poisoning while I feel like I have a touch of the flu. I slept all day while downing nausea meds. Finally we're both better.

2018 Kim's going to Alaska! She leaves tomorrow on a tour. She says she's trying to be excited. It must be daunting to be going alone, but she'll meet folks to pal around with and she'll have a wonderful time. We saw photos from her as she and a couple others were heading off to explore. , so she'd arrived alright and met some folks and is into her vacation. Good.

Oh Geez. I just heard about a tour plane in Alaska that crashed the other evening and they couldn't find it on the steep glacier mountainside. Something else to worry about until we realized we could text and catch up with her. She's fine and having a good time. I'm such a worry wart.

While We were slated for a couple pretty days with no rain, we went for a ride in SnazzyII. We entered a store in another town and were surprised to find a friend working there. We hadn't seen Dwayne or Linda all summer. We chatted quite a while and then wandered on...

Right next door was a nice big consignment shop several storefronts wide. here we ran into another friend from our volunteer days. Shirley was in Park Services Management back then and now here she is, the owner of this nice shop. We caught up on folks we all knew. But how funny to go into two stores in another town and meet two old friends!

Today we rode to Toccoa Falls with Nan & Bob. This town is home to a Christian College and there's a beautiful 186 foot waterfall on their property. We had lunch in town and a lovely day. Another day at the Holly Theater we saw The Hunchback of Notre Dame. It was fabulous.

I talked with Steve, my bro and he sounded good! He'd been working on his daughter's house and was feeling almost normal. That's good news. Then I Talked with Kim as she was lunching in Saskatchewan while her ship was in port. Her dinner is set with table mates that, by now, she knows. She'll fly home tomorrow. I learned after she was back home, that she did have a helicopter experience! Because she hadn't mentioned it I assumed it had been scrubbed because of the recent accident. We missed the Facebook postings so didn't get half the info. Well, what I didn't know-I didn't worry about.

Still August. We just learned that our entire community in Florida, Turkey Creek Forest will soon get a new address system. We must go from our lot number system to street and house numbers to make 911 calls easier for emergency vehicles to locate.

So Sam googled our new address and was directed to a house near our Wal Mart Store, quite a distance away. We Googled Pat & Jim's new address and found not one, but two other homes with the same address. Hoo boy, that really simplifies things!

My sister Bunny, AKA Lois, sent me a packet of letters I'd written her 60something years ago, right after she'd married and moved out of state. They're hilarious. We never laughed so hard. They begin in 1957. I was 13. Oh, what major concerns I had. I told her all about my busy daily schedule, itemized from 7am to 10:30pm. Then I asked her to tell me about her days now that she was married. Oh brother.

Nan & I took a girls day out, visiting different stores in tiny Cleveland. We had lunch at the drug store soda fountain. Linda & Dwayne came in and we shared our booth with them since the place was packed. We chatted till we finished eating and then left them to enjoy their lunch on their own. We were outside before we realized we hadn't left a tip for our waitress. I looked at Nan and said, " A tip?! Nan, we didn't even pay our bill!" Oh my gosh. It was too funny. We went back and settled up. Mostly because by then we needed to use their restroom!

2018 September. Many of our friends were at the Labor Day Luau in the clubhouse. We don't see as much of them as we used to. Mostly because they're so into the politics of the day. Trump, Trump, Trump! They love him. We've sort of extricated ourselves from the campfires where everyone seems to complain about everything. We'd rather sit out on the swing with books or our computers Or visit with neighbors passing by. It was good, though, to catch up with those that were there today.

We had pizza at Gustavo's with the NanBobs one afternoon. And Karen and Floyd took us to a Mexican restaurant near Clarksville where Sam's burrito weighed about 7 pounds! Could have fed all of us! It's always fun with these friends. They're such nice folks.

Our weather's super! Mid 60s early in the mornings with pleasant little breezes cutting across the yard. Today it felt nearly inspirational; I busied myself inside clearing away cobwebs and polishing things a bit while Sam scrubbed the RV roof... Twice! It was that filthy. I hate him being up there, THOUGH. Its scary.

Saturday afternoon Nan and I made our yearly linguine SHRIMP dinner. It was great! The next morning we had coffee AT the fire. A gorgeous start to our day. That afternoon we all went downtown Helen to the Arts & Crafts Show. I found a navy denim visor with pretty fall bling on it. Then, on our way to the Fest Hall, we stopped at Cowboys & Angels to get something to eat. Crab cakes, bison chili and such. Pretty dang good! Never did make it to the Hall that day.

Linda & Ron ARE back in their favorite campground in Cherokee. Some rain expected but we hope to meet them at the new Wild Willy's one day this week. Since it's rainy we thought we'd drive up by car and they could come in their truck for lunch. But now they have a problem with the truck! So, rain or no rain, that'll have to be fixed in order for them to get back home with their 5th wheel. I think They have the worst vacation karma in the land!

Saturday, Great day with Snazzy! We rode with a couple from our campground who have a new slingshot. Wally and Towana were fun and the day was perfect. We took War Woman Road to Highlands and ate at the Ugly dog Public House. I bought a black tee shirt with the poor dog pictured on the back. He's so ugly they keep a bag over his head. This is for Laura's birthday.

We got home at 5 after a stop in Clayton for a D. Q. Fifteen minutes later it rained. Perfect.

2018 October. The next day we all rode again, shocking everyone because we haven't been joining in most of their rides this summer, and here we were two days in a row! This was fun though, because this time we were all on 3 wheels, 3 trikes and Snazzy. We ate at the Rusty Bike in Clayton, near Tallulah Gorge. Afterward, we browsed in some of the stores in town. I ended up in a nice consignment shop called Tallulah Gorgeous where A very charming sales lady found an entire outfit for me. She was so sweet. I was looking for lightweight pants, cooler than jeans. These cute slacks have a zipper at one pocket and at each ankle. Plus, my friends found a pretty knit top that matches perfectly. My gal, Charlotte, and I developed a nice rapport. She said I had made her day; I agreed she certainly had made mine as well.

Saturday we rode to the Indian Festival at Woody Gap. Not much happening there but we each had a chopped pork sandwich. Even though it was loaded throughout with tiny globules of fat, I just couldn't quit eating it! It was so dag gone Delicious!

Nancy reported that their trip to Ronny's last week was great. They had good weather and did lots of fun things with his family. I'm so happy for them. And, Linda & Ron are now back home after their time in Cherokee. It, too, turned out pretty well. They had several good riding days until Linda turned an ankle and had to sit out some of the activities. Ron's brother and his wife were there so at least they had company.

Sam just read me the last of that pack of letters my sister sent me last month. Letters I wrote to her over 60 years ago when I was 13 or so. She'd just married and left home and I was trying mightily to keep her informed of the goings on back home. They're very, very funny. I was so wrapped up in my little life; my ever so important school schedule and babysitting chores, the roller rink and meeting Donna, and oh my, the boyfriends! One after another! Some of them I remembered this or that about and some I had totally forgotten. It was fun reading. I wish I'd written more and saved Bunny's responses.

One Sunday at the Holly Theatre with Karen & Floyd we saw Patsy Cline. A play of Patsy as she became famous and then the plane crash that ended her life. The gal playing Patsy was terrific. Afterward we ate on the deck at Shenanigan's. Lovely. Karen & Floyd had never been there and were impressed with the Irish menu: bangers and mash and such. I had the shaved steak quesadillas. Yum.

I spent an entire day on my computer downloading a slew of books. Then I put them onto my Victor Reader so I can enjoy them whenever I want. Love it!

Monday. We're heading into a big rainstorm this week: Michael's Coming up through the gulf. Several groups of Slingshots are scheduled to be here on Wednesday… we'll see how it plays out. .

Hurricane Michael came and went. Up through the gulf east of Tallahassee at Panama City and Mexico Beach, totally tearing them apart. A huge storm, almost a cat 5 as it came ashore in the panhandle. They were hit very hard, while we were blessed. Then it went across southern Georgia. All we had was ordinary rain throughout the night; today is cool, clear and Beautiful.

This morning we bundled up at 8am and rode with 5 other Slings. It was freezing as we rode up and down one mountainside after another. When everyone was frozen stiff, tired, and hungry, we stopped at J R's Road Kill BBQ for lunch. It had been exhilarating and we were starving. The rainbow trout was delicious. After it warmed up a bit outside we all took off in different directions. A fun day.

Saturday Sam and I trekked down to Buford to the mall for a Macy's visit. Just as I turned my recorder on to hear my shopping list, the batteries went dead.

I Couldn't remember any of the Estee Lauder stuff Kim and I wanted. Oh well, we bought a Cuisinart soup pot and a couple bed pillows.

One day we met John and Nancy Price, friends from Tennessee, for breakfast and a ride. We wound up at Mercier's Apple Orchard with them again. Then as they went north, we headed home.

It's cold here! Many folks are leaving for the South but we expect Kim in a few days so we'll hang out a while longer. We went to the Fest Hall for the German music and beer nuts again.

Super entertaining. Great band.

One day Nan & Bob took us to Bell Mountain. How is it we never heard of this place right in the center of Hiawassee? you simply turn onto a road that takes you up a very steep, narrow, rocky and bumpy road nearly to the top of a mountain. The views from there are fantastic. You look out over a chain of lakes while behind you the rock mountain continues up even higher. About 95% of them up there have been painted or defaced in one way or another. Can't imagine how people, probably kids, could even get to some of them without breaking their necks. Sam flew his drone around the mountain and over the lakes, filming as It flew. What an unusual place.

it rained all day Friday while Kim drove up from Florida to spend the weekend with us. She arrived around 4 and was glad we had a crock pot full

of steamy hot ribs ready for dinner. She was getting a sore throat so we just puttered around most of that weekend. After she left we began preparations to head back home the next morning. That evening it was dark, blustery and cold out and The rig was a disaster as I was packing up the kitchen and Sam was finishing outdoors. Karen, Floyd, Terri and Bruce came walking by on their way to the clubhouse to play Mexican Train. I invited the girls to come inside for a bit as I handed Sam a jacket. It was sweet of them to stop to say goodbye. We'll see them next summer.

October 30 . Heading home to Florida without the rig: just the Jeep towing Snazzy on her trailer. We were listening to a book and Sam missed a turn. so we came home on I75. It was Quicker than the back roads we usually use with the rig, and Traffic was easy at that time of the morning. As we pulled up in front of our house to offload Snazzy, Our neighbor, Pam, shouted at us. They too, had just arrived from Ohio. We all spent the next day unpacking and organizing. Now we feel sore throats coming on. Dang.

We got settled in but missed a Halloween Party at the clubhouse due to exhaustion and feeling punk. And we had the perfect costumes… BatMan and Robin were hanging in the closet!

A few days later. Still feeling yukky. We did bloodwork and stopped by the DMV to get updated.

What a hassle. All we needed was to change our address with them to be in accordance with our new mailing address system in Turkey Creek. Sam's was easy because he had a gold star next to his name on his current drivers license. But my Florida ID card has no such star. I had to prove I was a US citizen with all sorts of paperwork. This is only an I D card, not even a driving license, for heaven's sake.

Anyway, we each had a new photo taken and got permission to continue living in the USA.

Oh great. Sore throats are progressing into coughing, hacking and headaches. Next day Still sick and feeling horrible. Tomorrow's our

regularly scheduled Doctor visit and I need a big shot in the arm … or somewhere!

3 days later… still moping around here, coughing, hacking and sleeping. Doc Branin was very impressed with my chest cold. I've been sleeping sitting up for three nights. This hacking hurts my ribs. Got a strong antibiotic and a potent cough medicine and even an inhaler. Things lightened up a bit but still having coughing jags. Sam's a little better, but we both just sit around like zombies.

Saw Doc again, got more scrips and a chest Xray. I guess he's looking for pneumonia. This has been quite a siege.

We finished all the meds we had, feeling somewhat better but still coughing. Supposed to be going to Sarasota for Thanksgiving but I don't think it's a good idea. Bring on the Mucinex!

Later: Well, we made it through Thanksgiving! We'd been feeling punk for so long, I really didn't want to go anywhere, but the girls kept after us to get together for the holiday. So we did, And now we're FINE! But How can this be? And I must say, this was thee best holiday ever!

Our miserable colds had mysteriously disappeared and we all enjoyed each other for three days. Kim and Laura spent the whole time cooking and laughing together. I'm thrilled they have such a wonderful relationship now. I'm ecstatic! Who knew these two would ever get along like this?

Laura's house is unrecognizable! Matt's a wonder. Sam did his turkey in the newly renovated, covered porch out back. It's a lovely patio with lights overhead, a ceiling fan and a nearby water fixture. Very pleasant. Dinner was delicious and plentiful.

At our checkups later we got our flu shots and I learned I had actually had pneumonia! But I have to wonder, was this all psychosomatic?? How did it disappear so quickly?

Now to the wonders of nature..

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After horrible fires burned through much of California a couple months ago, the rains came and washed landslides down the barren mountainsides. Entire towns were washed away; just lost.

Then the winter storms began. One after another, freezing rain and snow came across the country.

Some began at the Pacific shore and some came down from the North. Most of them hit Texas, the Florida panhandle, and ON UP north of us through Georgia, the Carolinas, and up East. I've never heard of so many hard storms like this. Unbelievably , we were missed entirely.

2018 December. Christmas and birthdays.

We putout a few holiday decorations . Kim said she had most of her stuff out but not the rethomadore.

I thought about that while she rattled on and finally asked "Kim,exactly what is your rethomadore?"

In her fake southern dialect, she was saying My wreath on my door!

Oh geez. That's Kim and her marvelous sense of humor!

What a mess this change of address in our community has been. We got directives from Gainesville City and from 911 Rescue to change all our individual house addresses.

Our entire community used to be simply a certain number on 13th Street along with a lot number. Suddenly every street in our community is numbered and every house has an individual number fitting the grid. This is to make it more accurate and easier for rescue people and police to find us. With most businesses this was no problem, just a mailing address change. BUT What a nightmare it was for us peons!

Laura drove up from Sarasota when young Sam and Lizzie were in town. We all went to the Red Lobster for a late lunch and Kim's birthday celebration. It was a crazy fun time. We laughed our sox off. The next day at the Red Onion was another good time before Laura had to head back home. A few days later we celebrated Christmas at Kim's house. She worked hard on it. Alex made it to this one. He's been working long hours at Sonny's BBQ, from which came our Christmas ham. With it we had Kim's scalloped potatoes and fresh green beans, my sweet potato casserole, coleslaw, apple pie and ice cream. Everything was yummy and it was nice to visit with young Sam and Lizzie.

The next day We rode with Linda & Ron in their truck to Georgia and ate at their favorite BBQ, The Smokin' Pig. I must say, it was the best ever! And I'm not particularly crazy about BBQ!

By the 29th everything was tucked away and we were back to normal.

One day Sam and I browsed the Oaks Mall to see what was going on there. The old Sears is boarded up as they prepare it to become a medical facility. Macy's is gone. That entire space became Dillard's female departments. Dillard's original store on the other side of the mall is now their Men's Wear and housewares departments. Penney's is still doing business but online shopping is taking its toll there. .

I think our problems regarding the address change and new house insurance are finally over!

On New Years Eve, of all days, I received two letters from Security First Insurance. One was written December 21,2018. It said I needed a new roof and had no coverage at this time.

The next one, dated three days later, December 24th- Christmas Eve. Good grief. Who works that day anyway?!It said my insurance was fully in force since last November 16 and good thru Nov. 16 of 2019. Called Kelli after New Years Day and she confirmed that everything was fine.

New Years Eve,2018, had dinner with Ron & Linda at the Outback. Great time, more laughs.

Happy New Year all!

2019 January.

The new year had just made a pleasant debut with mild temps, light clouds and the sun peeping through.

I'm making a note here way after the fact. A sad fact. On this beautiful day our good friends Floyd and Karen, had a horrible accident on their bike. They survived but with bad damage. Not their falt. They are mentioned later as things progress for them.

Sam was asked to become the editor of our newsletter, the Gobbler. He agreed by volunteering both of us. We'd begin with the March edition.

Everyone was excited to have us doing this. He has great ideas of having the Gobbler available online with access to photos and videos. There'll still

be a paper edition for folks not on line. I've already written an introductory contribution for March and Sam also has an article ready to go. I see this will keep us busy.

2019 February. We've been going to the Y the past few weeks. Three times per week seems to smooth out some of the kinks. Of course, it's causing a few new ones also. No weight loss to note as yet, but maybe my muscles are getting healthier.

Kim and I had fun at Dillard's the other day. But how I hate giving up my Macy's discount! Since our local Macy's closed, the only way to shop there now is online or go to the Sarasota store when visiting Laura.

Our neighbors, Pam and Steve, went with us to the Valentine's Day breakfast. It was a benefit for the children's hospital at U F Shands. However, our waffles were like eating the cane back of a chair! I think they were prepared early and reheated. Oh well. It was for a good cause and was actually a fun time.

The next day George and Pam, a different pam, came bye so the guys could work on George's Slingshot. We gals visited in my little office. We discovered we like many of the same authors. Hopefully we'll have lots of time together and become good friends. When the guys finished their work we all went to Micanopy and had lunch at the Old Florida Café. They're such a sweet couple.

Laura's still at it with her house in Sarasota. It's been completely renovated since she got there 2 years ago. When she thought she was done an inspector said she needed a new roof. She Got that and now she wants a new ac. Luckily, some money her dad left her will help with that.

She received upsetting news from her eye doctor, though. She'll probably not be able to renew her driver's license when it comes due again.

Sobering news. Her eyes, like mine, Kim's, my mom's and grandfather's and so many of our relatives, get bad at this time of our lives. She's been aware of this possibility, but It's still Hard to take. Scary, even.

Lessee… Oh yes. We had our taxes done and I came out 500 bucks to the good. That's a little something positive to be thankful for.

We drove up to the Georgia lot to check on the rig and do some cleaning. All is in fine shape. Sam pressure washed the concrete pad while I bagged all the soggy leaves that had piled up. We'll do some more tomorrow and go home before the rains come again.

2019March. On Saint Paddy's Day we called Nan bright and early and sang a lively Happy Birthday to her. At the Irish pot luck dinner that evening, my Shepherd's Pie was a hit!

Uh oh. I woke up to the ringing of the phone early one morning. Mom, can you and Sam come pick me up and take me to work? I'm on 8th street and I've hit a bicyclist! Oh my gosh!

A week later… The cyclist had been taken to the hospital, was inspected and released. Thank God! Now we're holding our breath till we know if the guy is talking to lawyers or what. Don't know if he had lights on his bike at the time but it was dark out and 8th street has no bike lane. Kim's a nervous wreck.

(Ultimately everyone and everything was fine.)

2019 April. One morning we rode Snazzy south to the Black Water Grille below Cedar Key. A few days later we rode with George & Pam to Margarita's Breeze, another lovely gulf side place with wonderful food. The stuffed flounder with a creamy sauce, mixed veggies, coleslaw and excellent clam chowder. All to die for! a gorgeous day and a nice ending to the month.

2019 May. I chatted with my elderly neighbor in Sarasota and Got the scoop on Morris Street: two big old homes at the end of the block Have been demolished and replaced with four tall, narrow, close together McMansions. Over a million bucks each! Jane says they look strange in this neighborhood. She sounded good.

On Mothers Day I received a pretty little end table for next to the wicker chair in the new front room. It's adorable with a tiny drawer at one end, it snugs right up under the curve of the arm of the chair and makes the whole room complete… I hadn't realized the room was incomplete!

what a nice Mother's Day week end. Laura arrived Saturday with just two of her pups and Kim met her on the way so they arrived together. We had dinner at Ballyhoo Restaurant. nice. Later we hung around the house with luscious desserts watching TV. Sunday we girls met at the Flying Biscuit for our mid day meal. Then everyone disbursed and Sam and I had a quiet evening. Perfect.

One Saturday, just for the heck of it, we rode to Mount Dora and Had lunch at The Lobster Roll. Yummy. I love to browse around that cute village. I bought a pretty coverup: bright splashy colors on a yellow background. And we got some little pot holders with magnets sewn inside so they stick to nearby appliances. Cute and handy.

Another day we rode with George & Pam to Roy's Seafood on the Gulf. It's fun to share the day with them, but it was just too hot coming home. Slingshots need A/C! We're done with afternoon trips till we get back to the mountains again!

We, As editors of our Gobbler, just finished next month's edition. It takes quite a chunk of time getting it together. Glad there's none expected for the next two months.

One day while out in SnazzyII, we made a video of our “Sip & Ride”. This is our innovative idea of having a long flexible straw from the tall cups sitting in front of us in their holders right to our mouths. So much easier and safer than maneuvering a heavy glass while riding or driving. Fantastic! Just too cool!

We’ve also been working on music. We resurrected my old Compact computer from the closet floor to become our music box. It plugs into the TV system and music plays throughout the house Or the rig. We created playlists of all our stuff: soft music, Pop, country, fifties, R n R, movie themes, Christmas, etc. Hundreds of CD’s, all our own choices, to choose from. I just click on a category and It’s Never the same thing. Too cool. We take it with us on a jump drive or even take our third computer along when we travel. . I love it!

We’re nearly ready to leave for Georgia again. Sam cleaned the Jeep up and loaded SnazzyII onto her trailer. They’re all sitting in the garage, just waiting for the big day. We’ll leave early in the morning. Yippee!

2019 June. Paradise Valley Campground, Georgia.

We left the house at 4:15am! Very quiet and pitch black outside.

Everything was packed, house lights set, doors checked, we head out… two minutes later Sam realizes he forgot something very important-the hitch for towing the jeep with the rig.

We go back and get it from the garage, cut the light off and take off again. Months later we learned from the neighbors we had left the garage door wide open!!!! They wondered about it and discussed it for a couple days and finally figured out how to close it. But no one even called us.

Anyway, we had a pleasant 8 hour trip that day.

The best part was getting there shortly after noon instead of our usual evening arrival. We settled in, unpacked, and went to Helen for our Reuben sandwich.

Friday June 6. What a day. The car wouldn't start so we missed breakfast with friends. We went to the salon for our haircuts and learn that our appointment was yesterday! We Rescheduled and went to the Verizon store to update MIFI and get new phones. We want to try the new 4G MIFI. Went back to the rig, had breakfast and tried to figure out the new phones. How aggravating. Exhausted with malfunctioning car and crazy phones. Glad we got at least one errand accomplished. Haircuts.

This week was totally rainy and Most of next week will be the same. I noticed that between squalls the birds are exceedingly loud. It's almost like the cloud cover is enclosing them in a room around the rig. Our own surround sound. They're so happy when the rain stops they just sing their little hearts out!

Sunday Nan & Bob arrived around 5:30 and called to thank us for getting things ready for them. But she was in tears. It had been the trip from hell. Little Penny had nearly died twice along the way. The vet had given them tranquilizers for travel and Penny had a reaction. Nan thought she died. Then Penny smelled McDonalds in the car and she came around! This was the culmination of days of anxiety for them.

Then, when they arrived at their rig and found the water, the water heater, electric, and gas already working, and a cute 'scuze me' tee shirt in a gift bag on the table… she just lost it and The tears flowed.

FYI the tee shirt shows an adorable, pitiful little squirrel saying:

Scuze me, did you know your bird feeder is empty?

But now they're here, safe and sound. They'd already eaten so after hugs and all, we left them to get settled. The next day we all had shrimp alfredo linguine with fresh green beans, and a highball.

The day after that Nan fixed huge pork chops and sweet potatoes and we dined together again. It's so good to have them back. But I think Nan needs to get to a cardio doctor soon. She's been having scary feelings. Like palpitations.

Meanwhile Sam & I had our first workout here in Cleveland at AnyTime Fitness. I think we found all the machines we're familiar with from the Y in Gainesville and had a good workout.

2019 June 26. Good Grief! I'm 75 today ! The kids sent a huge box from Harry & David of Oregon fame. What fun we had digging into it! Besides the Moose Munch we all love, it had 40 or 50 different things in it: Oregon pears, snacks, cakes, home made cookies, trail mix, more snacks, fudge, a package of salmon, cheeses, crackers, licorice, baklava… and I don't know what else. Haven't gotten to the bottom of it yet!

Then,along with Nan & Bob and Cindy & Dean, we met at Gustav's for dinner. We laughed through the meal at my silly birthday cards. Later, back again at our picnic table, they rummaged through my box of goodies and selected the baklava to go with butter pecan ice cream from a local Amish Bakery. It was creamy and buttery and the pecans were crunchy and fresh. Oh my goodness, the best ever. What a yummy fun day!

2019 July. Sam and I rode SnazzyII to Tennessee to visit the museums near the Cherahala Trail. There were Two huge buildings of memorabilia to peruse: TV's, Victrolas, guns galore, pedal sewing machines, and much more in the first building. The second building was dedicated to the development of phones. Sam, my telephone man, was thrilled to see all the stuff He'd worked on and had practically grown up with. He was in seventh heaven!

One evening Nan & Bob came over for my bacon stew; Haven't made that in years, in fact they'd never heard of it, but they loved it. It seems like every time we get together lately, we have a high ball, like my parents used to do. Am I becoming my mother?

We are reading the Fern Michaels series called The Revenge of the Sisterhood. Seven gals of varying talents, actually vigilantes, avenge the horrifying deeds perpetrated on women. Things the courts can't seem to rectify. These gals are pretty brutal. A fun way to spend these rainy afternoons.

July 22. Now Sam is 75 also! Lots of happy phone messages and funny cards. After our workout we drove to Texas Roadhouse and pigged out. Excellent, of course.

As a finale to his birthday celebration, we went to the Holly Theater with Nan & Bob. We saw "Newsies". A wonderful production put on by the summer stock kids. They are so talented! The story is about newsboys in New York City around 1900 And how they planned to strike when their income was about to be cut. An excellent show followed with lots of shrimp at Captain Dee's. I'd Say we both had some pretty good birthdays this year. Welcome to ¾ of a century!

One day we rode with 5 other 3 wheelers to lunch at Batesville. No rip roaring 2 wheelers! It was so pretty and peaceful and such Lovely weather. The group talked about starting a club and calling it PVC on 3. Sounds like a plan.

But Unbeknownst to anyone else, Sam is considering selling the Slingshot and the Jeep to get something totally different. He's already running an ad to this effect. So we'll see what happens…

We had a special time the other day with Cindy & Dean when the four of us stopped at Ingle's for Iced latte's. They are such a lovely couple.

One evening with Nan & Bob over for dinner and cocktails, We all agree we've had more cocktails this year than ever before. Better watch out.

Sam and I rode with Cindy and Dean to Blairsville for lunch at Dan's Cuban Restaurant one day. Afterward we came home via the Richard B Russell Highway. It was fabulous! Perfect fall weather, just beautiful with colorful leaves everywhere.

A little levity here:

The following is an excerpt from an email I sent my brother Mick after a phone conversation with our other brother, Steve. It went like this…

Mick, let me tell you about something I thought of while talking with Steve the other day. Do you remember this? We were having perfect summer weather on Hunter street with Doors and windows wide open. You were about 6, Stevie about 4, I was the oldest, maybe 11. It was the dead heat of summer in Ohio and we were playing in the shady front yard with other kids. You had the hose in your hands, squirting all of us as we ran around squealing and laughing.

The city bus came crawling by, moving along our red brick road very slowly because of kids in the area.

Down our little street it came, right close to the curb as usual. There was no such thing as air conditioning and Each window along the length of the bus was raised as far as possible…

Yep… As you looked up to see if Mom was arriving from work… the hose automatically raised also.

Just enough for water to squirt directly into each window as it ever so slowly passed by!

Possibly the folks inside were glad for the reprieve from the heat, but our Mom did not get off at the corner. She went up Parkman Road a ways and walked home!

When I mentioned this to Steve, he laughed like I haven't heard him laugh in years. Too funny.

Thought you might also get a kick out of it. . Love you bro.

2019 September. While PVC served hot dogs for the Labor Day cookout, we went to a nice restaurant where I had a scrumptious chicken covered with onion, green peppers and mushrooms and white gravy. The others all had steak. I think they were jealous. Sam raved about his dinner, actually called Road Kill, but he had personal plumbing problems the next morning and for three days afterward! Ye gads, maybe it really WAS road kill!

Just got back from a ride with our new group: PVC On 3. Everyone in the group has a 3 wheeler: three trikes and a Slingshot. We Had a nice lunch in a tiny town called Lula. Then we stopped at Jaemore Farms, a huge farm fed grocery store where we had home made strawberry Peach Swirl ice cream. We bought huge Juicy peaches to take home. But along the way, our disability parking tag blew off Snazzy's dash and disappeared in the wind. We couldn't find it anywhere along the highway. Dang. The next morning we went back but still no luck. Finally, with his dash cam in Snazzy, Sam was able to zero in on exactly where we were when it blew away. And, ya no what?... He found it! What a surprise that was. So we went back to Jaemore Farms and had some delicious pie and coffee!

Linda & Ron will celebrate their 30th anniversary in a few days! Boy, that certainly was another time and another world back then.

Oh geez. This was hilarious...Nan & Bob were coming over for burritos one day. When they knocked at our door, Sam & I started barking from within.

Really loud yapping just like their dogs do when we knock on their door. . They stood out there laughing their sox off. It was hilarious.

I knew Sam was thinking of selling the slingshot, but then he popped the notion of selling the GEORGIA PROPERTY as well! That certainly was a surprise. But we're ready for a change

We might do some State Park camping this winter in Florida and then figure out next summer. We reserved a few days in Little Manatee Campground in December and a spot on the Alafia River for a couple days while we visit the Florida state fair.

In the meantime Sam hopes to sell the Slingshot, it's trailer, the PVC lot and trade the Jeep for a newer vehicle! That's the plan so far.

Meanwhile, we had a gorgeous day for a ride. A little cool weather finally came to the mountains. But then Nan & Bob had to rush home to Alabama when suddenly he became extremely ill. We learned he had inhaled a peanut into his lung and it developed an infection. who knew that could happen? We don't expect them back till next spring so Sam winterized their rig and closed it up.

Oh My Gosh! Everything's changed again! We already have a buyer for the lot! We won't need to worry about renting it out next summer. These folks have rented it from us a couple times while we were volunteering in Oregon so they already know it well. They'll be here in three weeks to make the deal. How great is that!

We'll take the Slingshot back to Florida beforehand and have only the jeep to tow home with the rig. Oh happy day!

Patty & Roy had a big outdoor gathering for Roy's birthday. Probably 50 or more folks attended . We sat with Cindy & Dean. We'll certainly miss these two when we all leave here.

At the fest hall recently I had my very first bratwurst and sour kraut with German potato salad. I couldn't believe how delicious it was. I never tasted this before, thinking it was like the Kielbasa my Dad used to stink our house up with when he boiled it. But this was delicious.

It was so nice being on our own that day. We didn't even have an urge to get up and dance. A sign of our age? We just sat back and enjoyed it. And The beer nuts were good.

Young Grey and I had a nice phone conversation. He told me all about his 6th birthday parties. Sounds like he had several of them. He chatted for quite a while. What A neat kid.

, Linda Lehigh stopped by to chat. She was shocked and dismayed to hear we'd sold our lot and were moving on. We must get with her and Dwayne before it's too late. These two, and Cindy & Dean, are folks we really like and have enjoyed these past years. We'll miss them.

We're getting the rig roadworthy and the lot ready for its new owners. Lots of stuff to pitch.

we tuned the radio to Casey Kasem and the Topp 40 hits of October 1972. Love that old stuff! It's great to listen to while cleaning house.

Later we had a pot of chicken soup cooking on the hotplate outside by the rig. Tomorrow will get cooler weather with a high of only 70. Hopefully that's the end of the nineties this year.

Sunday we rode to Dillsboro and Sylva in the Jeep. While riding along we decided selling the PVC site and the slingshot were the perfect things for us at this time. We're done with the hassle of extra property ownership and ready to pass up the Heat and cold of riding bikes.

Well, Wadda ya know! We're growing up!

When the time came, we drove back to PVC for the closing on the lot. It was A short visit, saying goodbye to as many friends as we could. Paul & Bonnie, Linda and Dwayne, Cindy & Dean, and many others.

On 9/19/2019 we signed papers and were free to leave.

Good bye PVC. It truly was Paradise for us.

This place holds so many wonderful memories, we leave with mixed emotions. . We're blessed to have had such great experiences And met so many good people.

We went back to Florida determined to sell the Slingshot. Not sad; just ready to move on.

OH how Nice to sleep in the king size bed again; and sleep we did. Exhausted. The next morning we hooked the music up and began the excavation. Everything in the house and the rig needed a good cleaning. we emptied the rig to the bone. Everything came out to be washed, given away or trashed. Too many clothes and too much stuff!

The buyers for the Georgia lot came through just fine. So that's done. The money's in the bank.

We celebrated with Linda & Ron at Yamato's.

2019 November. Sam brought the holiday stuff down from the attic. He put out the big pumpkin and the weird tin turkey with tanner, Stinky n Poo, and a myriad of squirrels and the racoon in the yard.

And The cat that still peers into the kitchen window. so we're set for the holidays. !

One day when Sam took the Slingshot to our local Polaris dealer to get a recall done.

He sold her and her trailer on the spot! Wow, I didn't realize how big our garage was!

Thursday, Thanksgiving Day and our 16th anniversary. We brought Kim and Alex to the clubhouse gathering with sweet potato casserole and a big green bean dish. Alex was a nice addition to our group.

Holiday décor began to appear around the house. The turkeys went back into the closet and Santa came out. And here we are with six open windows letting the cool fresh air in.

Oh how I love my crank out window at the kitchen sink. Every time I open it I think of my parents and their window back on Hunter Street and it feels like Christmas. !

Saturday we had our holiday get together with Linda & Ron at The Texas Roadhouse. A few days later we went with Kim and Alex to The Playhouse to see Beauty and the Beast. it was wonderful!

Alex seems happier with himself since he's working with UPS. And I'm happy for him.

Pam & Steve, our part time neighbors from Ohio are back and it's nice visiting and sharing meals with them again.

Big Bertha was in the shop a while and now has a new roof and several new awnings. Sam brought her home just a day before we'd planned to leave for a pre holiday mini vacation. As we drove the rig south to Little Manatee Campground, we saw where an oversize truck had rammed into an overpass abutment, holding things up on I75. Luckily, we were not involved.

We settled in at our site and had a relaxing drink before leaving to meet Laura and Matt for dinner. Our meal was outdoors at the Packing House Grill. It was lovely there but we were exhausted and hoped to get back to the rig early. But it was a dumb time to get back into traffic. both I75 and 3O1 were jammed. It took an hour and a quarter to go 30 miles! On the news this morning we heard another big truck had hit another overpass

yesterday, just 6 miles beyond where we were eating. What a crazy day onI75.

Saturday. Nice rain last night and a beautiful morning. Hung out with Laura until Kim arrived and we went downtown Sarasota to the Main Bar for our favorite sandwich. Then we girls hit Macy's for a little shopping. It's fun running around with these two. They each have a terrific sense of humor. They're fun and funny. Love it! We watched TV and ate pizza at Laura's until Sam & I had to get back to the rig.

Traffic was pleasantly normal at this time of the evening and we enjoyed some pretty symphonic music on the radio, which made this a very nice commute.

Sunday morning. 32 degrees in Sarasota Florida! Geez, I didn't pack for this!

Laura's house is coming along. There are four glass French doors across the front room. She and Matt decorated a Christmas tree inside each one so from the street it's like store window displays. Very pretty at night. Out back is a covered patio with lights up in the ceiling and a softly burbling water fixture running. With the comfy furniture out there, it's a cozy place to sit and watch the pups romp in the yard.

Today we'll get with Matt after work and have our gift exchange. While waiting, we got into the Karaoke machine; what a hoot! Sam's a riot with feet a flying and elbows apumping! It was great! After our little gift exchange, we went out for dinner.

On Monday, before Kim had to leave town, we met for lunch at Jason's Deli. Then she headed home and Laura went to work. Sam and I were about to go to the rig when Jane Bertolett phoned. We turned around and went to visit with her for most of the afternoon. I'm glad she called just then. She still lives on Morris Street and it was wonderful to see her. She must be well past 90 now and all her neighbors and college girlfriends are gone. I'm glad we stay in touch. We exchange book titles and notes a couple times a year, keeping up with each others families and such.

The next day we met Kathi at her local Olive Garden for our holiday visit. Then Back to Laura's for one more fun evening. Although she fought it wholeheartedly, we coaxed her into going with us to the Dutch Valley for a good old fashioned Amish dinner. Matt wasn't available so she gave in and came along. And I think she EVEN enjoyed it. It's been great fun spending time with the girls and friends this week, but we must get back to real life now. And thankfully, we had a pleasantly uneventful trip back to Gainesville.
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Young Grey was on TV on "Kids Say the Darndest Things". He had a short line about Santa. Too cute.

During the next few days I made a pot of chicken soup and two batches of Pineapple cheese cake. We snuck some to Kim's fridge with a note. "Santa was here and One of the cheese cakes is just for Alex." They came with us for dinner at the rec center. I'm so PLEASED with him; he seems Happier and nicer and more helpful to his Mom now that he has a good job.

December 29, 2019. Oh No!! My favorite childhood place in all the world just burned to the ground! Champion Roller Rink near my hometown in Ohio is gone! What a shame. I felt the loss all day today. My sister in law, Nancy, called with the news, knowing how much I'd loved going there all through my teens. In fact, that's where I met her step brother, Curt, whom I married. I'm at a loss for words. So sad.

Tuesday, New Years Eve 2019. It's been a good time for us. Sam certainly has kept things interesting. God bless him and Happy New Year to all.

Wow. We have a buyer for the lot! Next year will be exciting!

January 1, 2020. Happy New Year again. At 75, Sam and I are well and happy. Living in Florida with occasional local RV trips. The past 15 years have been busy and exciting. Summering in the Georgia mountains was wonderful and traveling out west and up East And being able to visit so many friends and relatives has been a blessing. Now we're settling down, have minimized our toys, and will try to act like adults.

We still live in Turkey Creek Forest in Gainesville Florida. We still listen to books and music and Sam still makes informative videos about products available online. But, yes, We've slowed down a bit.

All our children are in their fifties. Both my girls are dealing with the family eye problem. Recently Dr. Elliot Burson of Boston's Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary named this disease: Diffused Choroidal Dystrophy. In my case it affects my central vision leaving me with a little peripheral vision. Thank heaven I still have that! I presume it can affect everyone a little differently.

Kim still works at the hospital, heading the infusion room of the oncology department. But it's become a challenge. She's worked 35 years at this hospital and she'll be okay when she finally relinquishes her position. She owns her home and currently shares it with her oldest son which is good for both of them.

Laura also has this eye problem; no driving at night. She's spent 4 years cleaning, renovating, and improving the house her dad left her in south Florida. She's a great dog lover and has five little rescue pups. She rented out a room to help with finances. I pray eachof my girls will have someone in their life who will help them along as I've had Sam. He's been a fabulous partner.

Curtiss, Haley and Grey are doing well in Manhattan; working and studying. Grey, 6, is beautiful and bright and is experiencing things like keyboard and guitar lessons, martial arts and who knows what else!

And now: the rest of my story…

2020 January. Gainesville, Florida.

As we close one segment of our lives and enter a new one, we feel foot loose and fancy free and we look forward to new adventures.

One Saturday evening when Kim came for dinner we watched “Judy”. Renee Zellweger was terrific as Judy Garland during the last months of her life. sad, but true. Good movie.

We had fun celebrating Ron’s 60th birthday at Yamato’s Japanese Restaurant. As usual, delicious. He and Linda had their Margaritas while I had a Dragon something or other with rum which made my nose itch throughout the meal. Smarty pants Sam stuck with a beer.

We camped at Alafia River State Park while we visited the Florida State Fair. We traipsed around the fairgrounds like old folks do. It was fun just being there amidst the sounds and smells and throngs of folks having fun. Ripley’s Believe It or Not was full of interesting and unusual things. In Cracker Country Sam learned to make a cobbler in his Lodge Dutch Oven and we enjoyed a live concert of pioneer music. And before leaving we stopped for their wonderful strawberry shortcake!

2020 February. Another day we were at Jason’s Deli with Kim where lunch included a cup of lobster chowder. Oh my goodness, it was delicious . The sweet old black guy that works there walked by our table and asked if everything was ok, Ladies? I was just scraping the remnants out of that little bowl. I pointed to my empty cup and asked pitifully, Do you do refills? He

said he'd see what he could do and Suddenly there was another full cup at my place. Wonderful! !

Saturday, Feb 29. Leap Year babies celebrate today. Kathi was having her 17th actual birthday. My brother Steve asked her, now that she is of age, to marry him. Never mind that they're 68 years old! Nor that he has a wife! Meanwhile, quite a crowd gathered to celebrate Leap Year at our rec center with food, music and dancing. As MC, Sam entertained everyone with his own distinctive form of rock n roll.

2020 March. Covid19. Well, so much for being foot loose and fancy free... .

Suddenly the world is inundated with news of a fast moving disease that recently came from China. Thousands of people there have died already and it's spread to 47 other countries!

We may not be here long enough to worry about it! We only heard of this six days ago. They're calling it a worldwide pandemic. It's referred to as Covid19, so named because it's a variation of other viruses. Corona refers to the look of it; like a halo around a spot. 19 refers to the fact that it began in 2019. Hence:

COrona VIrus Disease = COVID19.

It is quickly covering the globe. . It began in Yuan, China, where thousands of people have already died. Italy has lost thousands also. Older people with compromising health issues are hit especially hard, yet children don't seem to be particularly susceptible.

Sam and I are pretty healthy but, nevertheless, we're isolating ourselves for the next few weeks. All national sports events have been cancelled. Even March Madness! Some events are going on with no audiences. All kinds of gatherings are cancelled. All restaurants and businesses are closed. Grocery stores are regulating the number of people allowed inside at one time. Disney Parks worldwide and all State Parks are closed . No theater or meetings or gatherings of any sort are allowed until further notice.

Air traffic and cruise ships have been halted.

This is a new, unknown virus with no available vaccine to combat it. And none will be available until sometime next year. A very serious epidemic. It feels like the flu as it goes into the lungs and kills quickly. Stores are out of the supplies we need. They say warmer weather may cause it to go away, so we isolate ourselves and wait. This is very scary. Even the Pope has been exposed to it. Every day hundreds more succumb and More countries totally closed down.

Note:

At this point I have deleted many pages I'd written regarding the pandemic. This info is available in history books.

Meanwhile… Young Grey is learning to use the computer with his Daddy as he's being home schooled. They're all doing fine in New York. Curtiss and Haley can work from home and still get paid. But I worry about Kim working in the hospital. She's head of the infusion room, but who would know if someone came in with this virus? Thank goodness, they take the temp of every person entering the hospital. This is scary. I'm going to go bury myself in a book.

Days later: feeling better. I made stuffed peppers that we'll finish up today. Lizzie and I had a nice chat on her birthday. Her Sam's home with her in California and they're having a good time together . .

Shortly After moving into this house, Sam put an antenna up and stopped the cable service with its ongoing bills. He reassigned all that wiring to be used for our music system throughout the house. I love it. The old antenna provides plenty of televised entertainment. And over the years even that's been greatly enhanced.

2020 July.

We camped at Hillsborough River for a few days; not to visit anyone but just to be there. It's so refreshing, a week of R & r. One morning we drove to the river and browsed around a bit as Sam reminisced about volunteering here back in 2002, helping build the bridge, conducting tours

at Fort Foster, working at Ybor City and such. That was just before we met each other. It was a nice walk through the woods and down memory lane.

Monday, July 27. Kim had a bad day yesterday. Our worst fears came to pass. She had a collision with another car that totaled both of them. Thank God, everyone walked away unhurt. She now admits her driving days are over. Very, very lucky. She's had several warnings, as I did when going through this phase of this eye disease, and now her car is eliminated. On to the next step.

2020 August Wow. My brother in law's 87th birthday. . He and Bunny have been together for63 years! I remember him hanging around, sharing my Lipton Chicken Noodle soup with me, waiting for her to get ready for their date. She, barely 18, and he a few years older.

Sam and I are camping for a week or so at Lake Louisa State Park near Orlando. A nice place! I called Donna, my childhood friend and skating partner, and realized we were only a few miles from their home in Winter Haven. She was so excited to hear from me and we visited with her and Dave all afternoon. It was wonderful. None of us can believe we're as old as we are! She and I were best buds in our teens as we went roller skating every Saturday night together until I married Curt and moved to Florida. They were some of the best years of our lives. Sam and Dave got along famously as they spent the afternoon in his workshop. There was so much to talk about; so much has happened in the past 60 years! We hardly scraped the tip of the iceberg. We're thrilled we had this wonderful reunion. Who knows if we'll ever see each other again.

One daySam and I rode to Winter Garden. Although this little community was begun in 1889 or so, it's a beautiful, upscale town with fine stores, businesses and restaurants. At it's center are pretty red bricks and the old railroad tracks pass through. There's a tall clock tower that was donated and installed in 2003. Nearby is a fountain and pond, along with a couple nicely

shaded swings for folks to rest on. All the food places were specialty shops. So after years of hearing about these two towns in Florida, and living here for 60 years, I've finally been to Winter Haven and to Winter Garden! What a great day!

Two weeks have passed since Kim's crash. She's doing well, getting used to not driving. She used Uber a few times and it worked out well enough, but she's looking for a new house in town on a bus line.

On August 29, 2020 Sam bought the most adorable new car. A Mini Cooper! It's Moon Walk grey with black racing stripes. He's so excited. He was mentioning this kind of car years before we ever heard of a Slingshot. And now he has one. It's just precious. Unlike Snazzy, it has 4 doors, 4 wheels, a roof, and A/C! It's brand new with all the latest gadgets. It's roomy and comfortable. We are over the moon!

Today we rode about 80 miles to have a wonderful grouper sandwich at Peck's on the Water. They were delicious. It was over 95 degrees today, yet Mini was cool and comfy. He drove her on the super curvy Azello Trail and was very pleased with her performance.

This is the first time in many years we stayed in Florida all summer. It's hot!! High 90's with 110 heat index. Wow.

But with this virus lurking around, we feel fine staying home, enjoying the AC.

2020 September 19, Saturday. time to travel again. 10am. We left Florida in Big Bertha, towing the Jeep. (The Mini cruiser is not a towable vehicle.) Heading to Hiawassee Georgia for a couple weeks. We hope to see some of our PVC friends. Ninety miles up the road the rig had a blowout. nothing happened…we wondered if we'd hit something or something hit us or what! Sam pulled off I75. Yep, one of the duel set had a blowout. We located a repair shop only 15 miles further up the interstate. How convenient. So we camped at Nero's Tire Service for two nights. All six tires got replaced. Sam thought they were about six years old but actually they were a little over 9.

They say to change them at 7. we were lucky nothing got torn up. We've heard horror stories about blown tires tearing up rigs.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the shop… Sam called Nero's. We arrived, Sam unhooked the car and pulled the rig where an attendant indicated he should park it. then a guy came from the office and informed us we were at the wrong shop! Oh. We had spoken to Nero's but ,this was Reno's! We hooked the car up again and puttered on down the road to Nero's! How weird to have two humongous businesses like that working on trucks and rigs, just a quarter mile apart, and with such similar names!

Anyway, we settled in for the duration. New tires would arrive Monday morning. Here we were with thousands of truck tires but we needed RV tires. Who knew they were different? We went to nearby Valdosta for some groceries and had lunch and a latté at McDonalds. Our first night at Nero's Tire Store (and Campground) was pleasant enough. Dinner that evening in the rig was a bowl of Cheerios with banana . That big iced, spiced pumpkin latté we had earlier had really filled us up. Sunday passed unremarkably. Monday morning our tires arrived by 10am and we were on the road by 1pm. and settled in our Hiawassee campsite by 8 that evening: tired, retired, hungry and only one day later than expected. Not too bad.

We were thrilled to see Floyd and Karen, the couple who suffered that horrible crash on their bike 18 months ago. Karen's been through so many surgeries she's lost count. Now she got out of the car and WALKED, albeit very, very gingerly across the lot to the restaurant! OMG! How exciting! It's Almost miraculous!

We were so happy to see them! We had lunch together and then adjourned to our rig for wine and visiting. This whole trip was worth it just to see them recovering. These are two of the nicest people we know.

Another day we met Cindy and Dean at their favorite restaurant Sicily's Italian in Blairsville. And again, its great to sit and chat with good friends. They're all such sweet folks.

After a visit with Nan & bob We prepared to head home the next morning. It had been a nice break.

Another happy note… in new York, Grey had a party at a local park as he turned seven. I heard it was a big success. He's in 2nd grade and home schooling because of the virus. They're all doing fine.

And Kimarie has some news: She's about to become a Grandmother! Young Sam and Lizzie are expecting a baby boy in December. James Tavish Kleinsasser.

She'll be Gramma Kim and I'll become Great Gramma Gail. She already dubbed me "G3".

While chatting with them, I made arrangements to supply Lizzie and Sam with the little guy's diapers for a year or so. That should help them get started.

Kim has a buyer for the house she's selling, and she has her eye on one near her work. Since she no longer drives, this move will give back some of the independence she lost recently.

Sam and I, and most sane people, are still hibernating in our homes as this virus rampages across the nation. As of today: there's been 1.3 million deaths world wide. That's quite a hoax!

We're being told in no uncertain terms to stay home this holiday season, have small gatherings, and don't travel. So of course the airports are jammed and it seems most folks think they're immune. Watch the figures rise in two weeks.

There is some good news though… several vaccines are being prepared and will be partially available in the next few weeks.

2020 Thanksgiving Day. Our 17th anniversary. Dinner was nice and very easy. Three pounds of turkey breast, seasoned and frozen. Just popped it into the oven and it cooked perfectly in 2 hours! It browned itself and came with a nice gravy. Kim spent the day with us as we watched Christmas movies.

The next day fall was put away and Christmas showed up: the tin snowman with his lunchbox stands out front, the big red bows are mounted on each side of the garage door. And starlight lamps twinkle all over that big door all evening.

Inside, my little pull up tree is on the table In front of the kitchen windows. Santa Placemats and a sleigh full of tiny wrapped packages are scattered on the dining room table.

And, of course, there's the pretty Rethomadore! And that's enough decor.

2020 December.

I chatted with young Sam and Lizzie about their new son, James Tavish. my first great grandson! All is well with them and I'm now officially Great Gramma Gail... G 3 . Cute, huh ?.

Kim closed on her property December 30th The last day to qualify for homestead exemption!

Christmas was nice. Three days at Laura's with just the two quietest pups was sweet. I'm glad my family encouraged us to make the trip. . We had a wonderful time together. So much has changed since ALL three OF my children went through the experiences of helping their father and then the shock of his sudden passing.

It seemed like everyone was more relaxed, things were settled, feelings assuaged, and laughter allowed to bubble up. Everyone seemed at peace. This was the best holiday ever!

Merry Christmas everyone!

And later, back in Gainesville, New year's Eve was as we like it, quiet. .

PS. Did you know what a rethomeder is?

Answer: Wreath on my door!

A note from the author.

In the past 20 years Sam and I had so many wonderful adventures and experiences together I felt the need to share them with everyone. We hope you've enjoyed them.

A Tribute:

I owe this entire work to Sam: My best friend and partner for the best part of my life.

Without his kindness, compassion, his vast knowledge of computers, electronics and machinery this work would never have been completed. For over twenty years he's put up with me, shared his life and his knowledge with me, and as my vision diminished, he literally kept things running.

God bless you Sam. I'll love you till death do us part.

I can't express my good fortune to have had Sam in my life. Without him this computer work would never have gotten off the ground. He's so talented, innovative, creative and determined. He can answer any question, fix any thing and solve any problem, indoors or out. And he's always so patient and ready to help. He is unbelievable...and so darn nice. !

Things are pretty quiet around here these days and we both find a little snooze in the afternoon refreshing. Life is comfortable. It's been quite a ride.

Signing Off now : With all my love, Gail

Janet Gail Rogers Venn Flynn and in my heart Owens.

The end